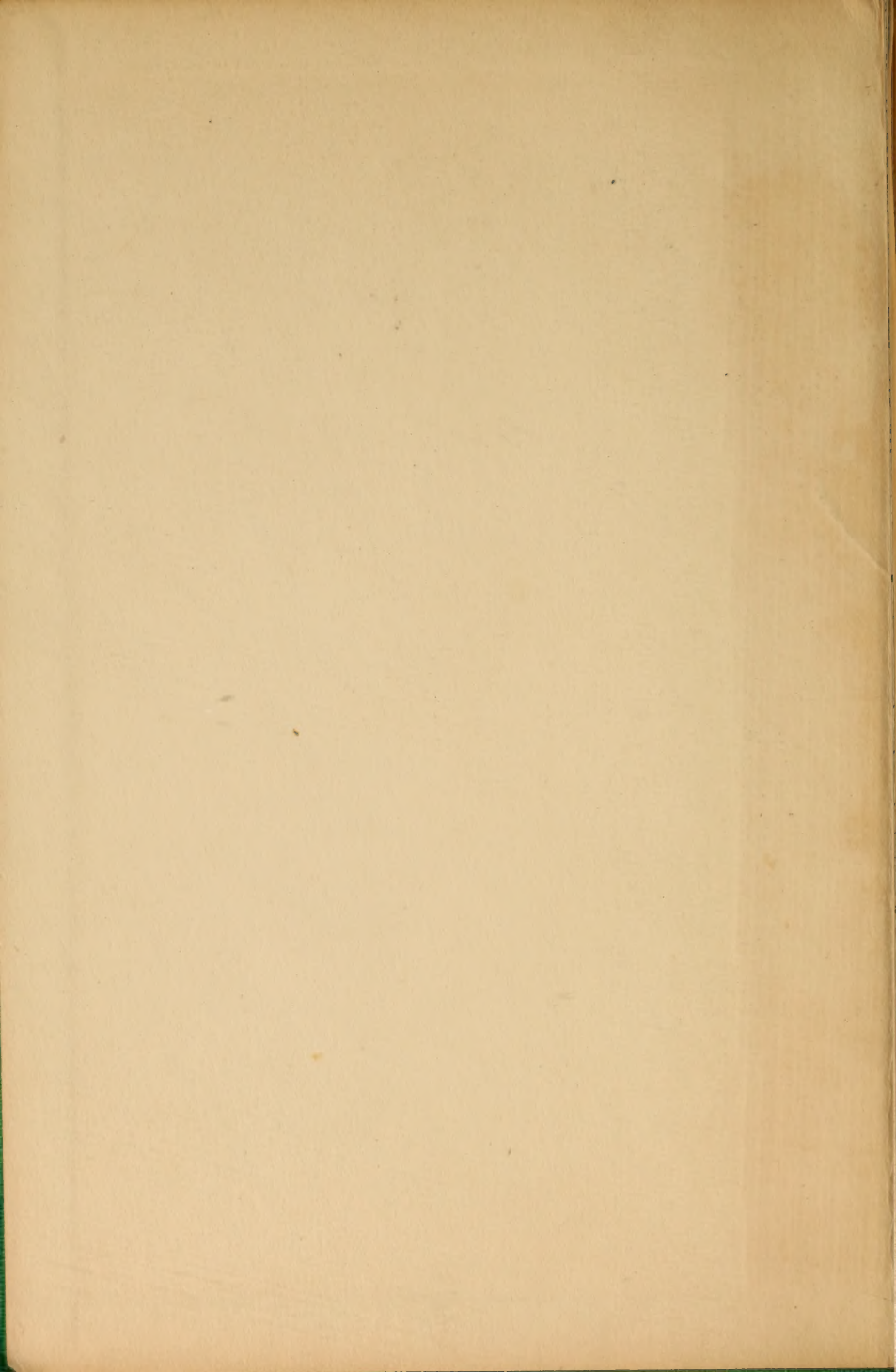


IMMORTAL LONGINGS

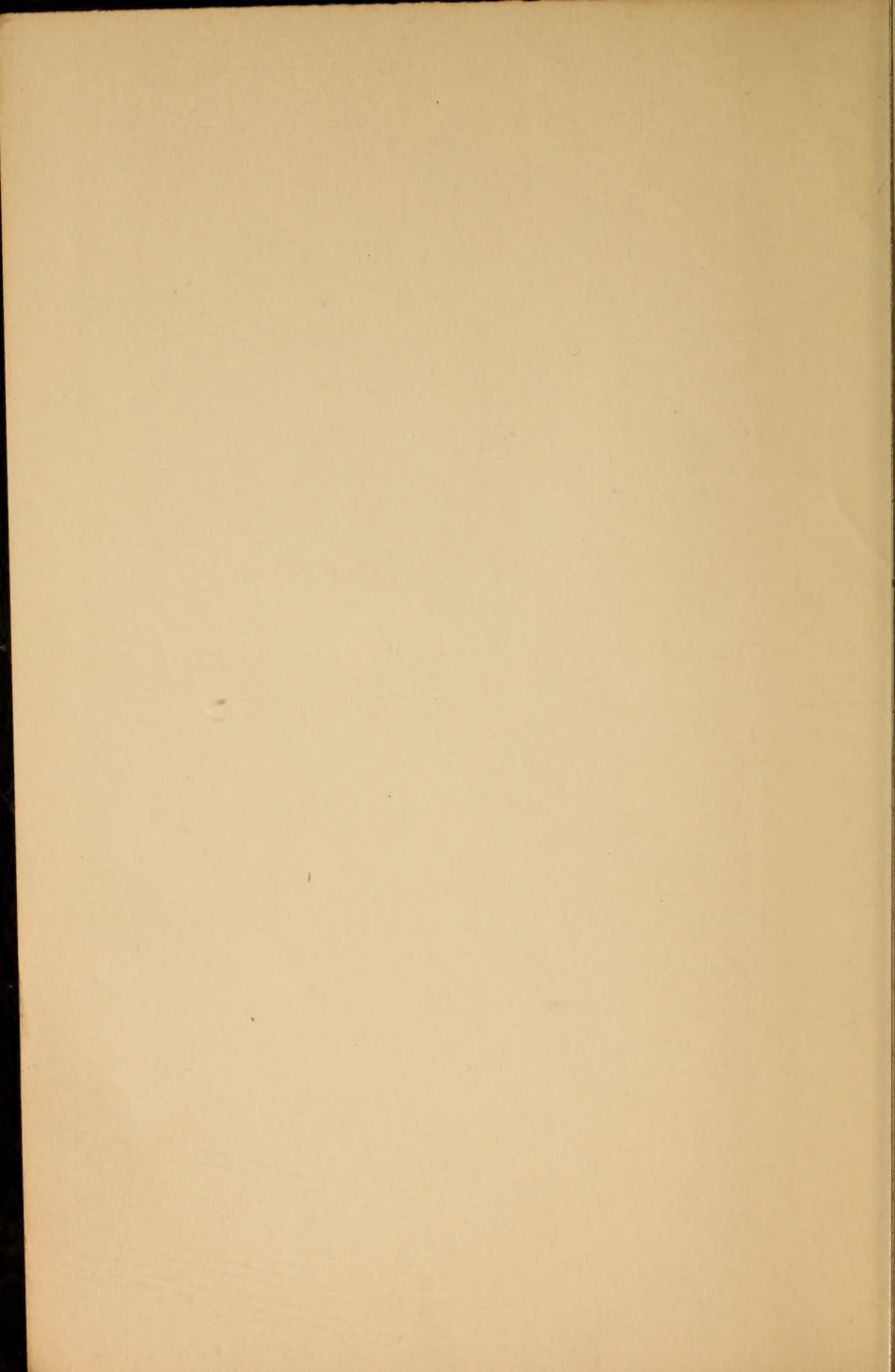


BEN AMES WILLIAMS



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IMMORTAL LONGINGS

BY

BEN AMES WILLIAMS

Author of "The Silver Forest"



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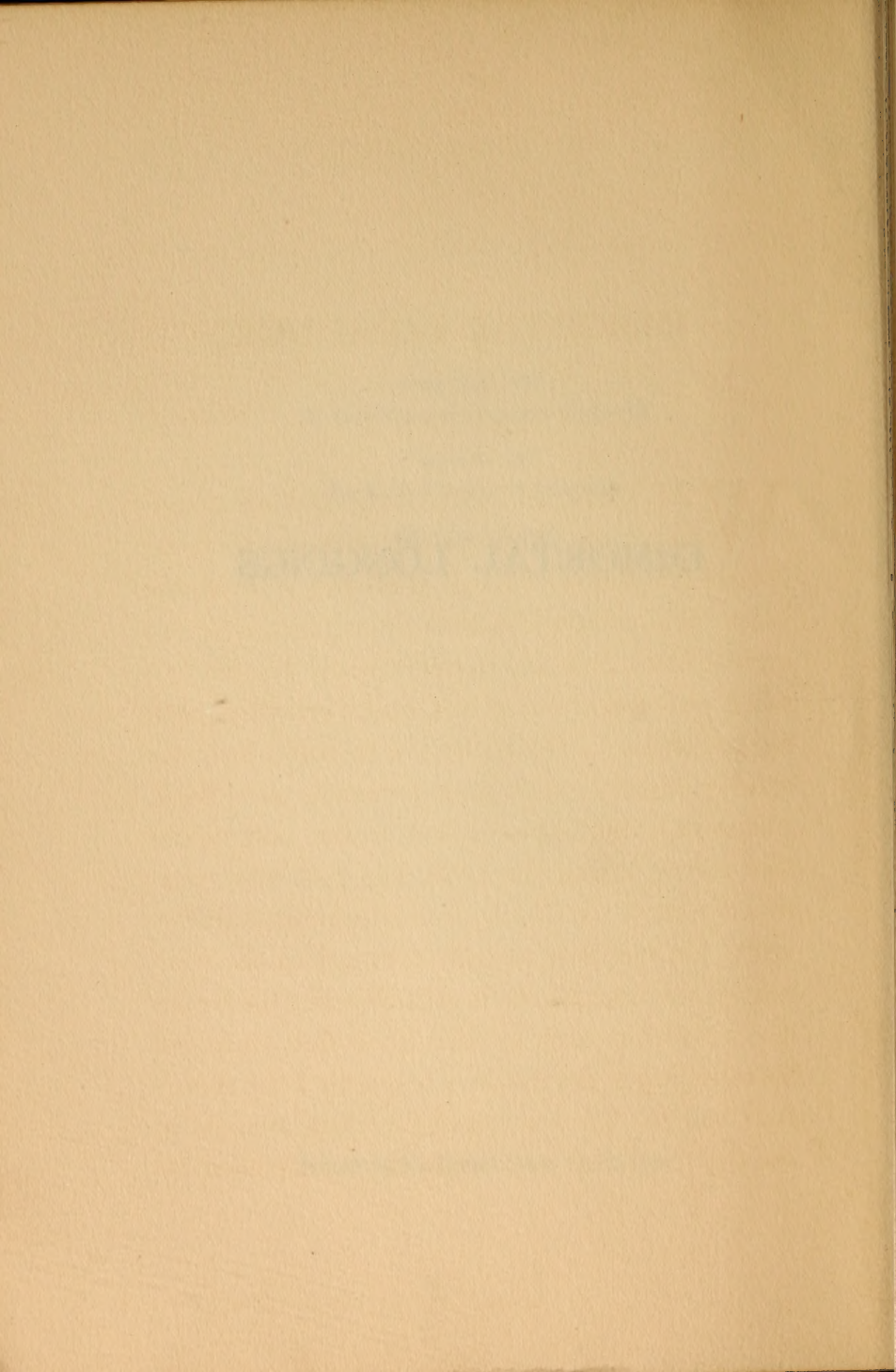
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IMMORTAL LONGINGS



IMMORTAL LONGINGS

CHAPTER I

WALTER OVERLOOK had an apartment on Eighty-sixth Street, with an English butler, a French chef and a Japanese valet. His valet woke him at a quarter before eight o'clock and had slippers ready for his feet when he stepped out of bed, and a dressing gown for his arms. In the bathroom he could hear the shower already running, and when he came back, pleasantly tingling with hot water, cold water and coarse towel, the little Jap had other garments ready. Overlook dressed almost indifferently, his thoughts already forward to the business of the day. In the breakfast room the butler uncovered his eggs, poured his coffee, unfolded his newspaper. At the door below his Irish chauffeur had the town car, and Overlook relaxed in the sheltered rear seat while the man picked his

dexterous way downtown. He had given the valet a nod, the butler something like a bow; to the chauffeur he spoke his first articulate word of the day. At the entrance to the towering building where his office was, he dismissed the man briefly.

"Four o'clock," he said, and the Irishman touched his cap and drove away.

His office was antiseptic; an Oriental rug upon the floor, three chairs, a table with mathematical arrangements of books and magazines, a desk with a glass top, a dictating machine upon a little stand, a ticker in the corner, two or three careful pictures upon the walls. He touched the third button and a young woman came in; a young woman rigid and inhuman beneath her enamel. Overlook was already seated; he looked up.

"Mr. Harmon at 10:45," she said. "Mr. Holmes, Mr. Cash, Mr. Sigbert at 1:30. Mr. Jenks at a quarter of four."

Overlook's mouth moved in a faint grimace. "Cancel Mr. Jenks," he directed. An annoying man, Jenks; he was forever urging Overlook to

go off fishing with him somewhere. Overlook was not in a fishing mood this day, nor like to be.

The young woman had registered his instructions; she now opened the leather folder under her arm and took from it a sheaf of letters, flat and ready for his eye. These she divided into two piles, laid them there before him. One pile was thick, but there were only two or three letters in the other. Overlook examined these first. The uppermost was from Randolph, somewhere in Montana: "If you ever take one look at this country you'll stay, Walter. I can show you some things——" He laid it aside. The next was from Sims, in Düsseldorf. The cafés, said Sims, were very gay. Overlook lifted the third, and the young woman spoke coldly.

"I was not sure where to put that one," she explained. "It seemed hardly business. "

Overlook glanced at it; his eyes ran it through. A letter scrawled in pencil, on cheap, lined paper, by an uncertain hand:

DEAR SIR:

Yes the hay is in. There was a stout crop, only not in your meadow. It's all alders, and popple in the

south end. It won't hardly pay for cutting, but I put it in the barn.

The roof needs some shingles.

We've had a dry summer and a frost in July.

Yours sincerely,
POT RIDDLE.

Overlook read this to the end; and then, more slowly, he read it through a second time. The young woman shifted her position slightly, as though to suggest that this was no hour for dreaming; nevertheless, Overlook's eyes were clouded. He leaned back in his chair, staring at the penciled sheet. But he did not see it; he was seeing a morning a good many years ago.

A meadow, long and narrow, with a road along one flank and a road across one end; and a deep, gentle stream, running moderately straight, along its other border. At the southern end the forest, second growth—poplar and birch and young hemlock and spruce and pine; and a boy grubbing out poplar seedlings and alder sprouts in the southern end of the meadow and along the stream side.

The hay had been cut a fortnight before; and the ground, thus shorn, was baked dry by the summer sun; above it heat waves shimmered; there was a heavy yet a stimulating fragrance in the air. The boy was barefooted, and he moved cautiously in the stubble. The stumps of grass did not disturb him; but here and there the mower had cut off alder sprouts, and their ends were painful. His grubbing hoe was none too sharp, but he did not greatly care. If he were not at this work, there would be other tasks for him to do; so he worked indolently yet continuously, looking north along the meadow now and then toward the low white house beyond the road. Once he saw, up beyond the house, a great hawk soaring in wide circles across the valley, hunting on tireless wing; and he paused in his labors to watch the hawk, until a man came out of the kitchen door of the distant house and made a compelling gesture toward him. Then he went to work again.

The man was his father; and from the house half a mile away his father could see the whole breadth of the meadow, except here and there in

the small bends of the stream, where the trees along the water formed a screen. The boy remembered this; and he worked his way into one of these bends, out of sight. There was a deep pool here. He heard something splashing in the pool; and he crept up on hands and knees to peer over the high bank, and saw another boy in the water, half submerged, paddling like a dog.

The boy on the bank grinned, and reached down under the sod and got a handful of earth, full of loose gravel, and flung it spatteringly down upon the other boy. The other boy's fat back was freckled with it; his round face turned upward in swift and pained astonishment.

When he saw who had flung the dirt, however, he held no malice; only called softly, "Hello, Walt. Come on in! It's just as warm!"

The boy on the bank stood up and made two contortions and his garments fell from him; he slid cautiously down into the water. It was deep and pleasantly cool; and upon the sandy bottom there was a little slime, pleasant between the toes. One needed only to avoid the submerged stubs here and there. The two disported together,

ducking and snorting and splashing, forgetting after a while to subdue their voices. So by and by a man appeared upon the farther bank and stood there grimly for a moment before they perceived him, and then he stripped a switch from the alder at his side. This sound the fat boy heard, and looked, and saw, and in a curious silent panic sprinted out of the water toward his clothes. The switch drew a red welt across the back of his fat legs as he ran; and the other boy fled up the dirt bank to his own side of the stream, and was in his clothes and grubbing again almost instantly.

The fat boy who got the whipping was Pot Riddle.

Overlook roused himself and began to dictate, and finished; and the young woman folded her notebook and moved toward the door. He spoke to her in a thoughtful tone.

"Never mind canceling Mr. Jenks' appointment," he said. "I'll see him if I can."

And she nodded and disappeared. She had taken the other letters with her; but he kept Pot

Riddle's by him. He had had letters from Pot before, during the fifteen years or so since he left the valley. Not many of them, but a few. A dozen years ago Pot had first written, to say that the elder Riddle was dead. "I'll go ahead and look after the place for you the same as he did, if you want," Pot assured Overlook, and Overlook authorized him to do so.

Once or twice since, Pot had written him for money—small sums—thirty-two dollars and ten cents for taxes; ten dollars and fourteen cents; twenty-two and a half dollars. Usually the hay Pot cut on the old farm was sufficient to pay its upkeep. There was never any surplus, and Overlook had sometimes thought he might as well sell the place and forget it. But it had a way of coming back to his thoughts more and more frequently these later years. This year, for the first time, something had prompted him to write to Pot and ask whether the hay had been cut. This letter was Pot's reply.

He put it in his pocket and addressed himself to the business of the day; addressed, that is to say, the surface of his thoughts, his outward ac-

tions and demeanor. He was, somehow, not much interested; he had done and said the same things so often before. An absurdly monotonous business, this trafficking in money after it ceased to be money to a man. In the first years there had been the desperate and sweating thrill of the gamble and the exultant satisfaction of watching three digits grow to four, to five, to six. Now, even while he talked to Holmes and Cash and Sigbert about the affair which would increase the six to seven, his inner thoughts were playing with this amusing way of stating the case.

"Seven digits in fifteen years," he meditated whimsically. "A digit every two years. Seven now; and eight two years from now; and then nine."

But a little later, when the attention which their talk demanded was relaxed, another aspect of the matter struck him. "But I had ten digits when I started out. Born with them. Twenty, in fact." And he wondered whether he would give one of these digits with which he had been born for one of those he had so painfully acquired.

"What do you say?" Cash demanded; and Overlook realized that this was the second time Cash had put the question, and he forced himself to be attentive once more, to be crisp and efficient and decisive.

But before they were done he began to be sleepy; and when they rose to go he said casually, "I'm going to take a rest after this—take a few weeks off. Haven't had a vacation in fifteen years."

Holmes asked doubtfully, "How about the Intercity Traction? That's going to blow up this summer."

"Someone else can have it," Overlook told him. "I'm going fishing."

"I say," Cash suggested, "why not go out to Colorado and have a look at that dam site? Good rest for you, and good business too."

But Overlook shook his head, sent them away, had a curious sense of freedom. In a little while now Jenks would be here.

He had always, till today, found Jenks rather a bore, a waster of time; but today he listened with an inattentive pleasure to the other's rhap-

sodies. Now and then one of the man's phrases penetrated, registered with him:

"The finest trout brook in Maine. . . . The only place I know where you can take landlocked salmon on the fly. . . . A pond full of trout. . . . A strike on every cast. . . . Good food."

Overlook at last put a decisive question. "Can a man sit in a boat in the shade and go to sleep?" he asked gently, and Jenks laughed at him.

"Sure, if you want to. The salmon won't drag you out of the boat, even there."

So Overlook agreed to go.

CHAPTER II

JENKS went ahead, some final matters delaying Overlook a day or two. But he was impatient; and when the efficient young woman asked where the office could get in touch with him he grinned at her—it was the first time he had ever grinned at her—and said, “You can’t get in touch with me. I’ll be back one of these days—by and by.”

Rand was his office manager. “If so-and-so happens,” he asked anxiously, “what shall I do?”

“Let it happen,” Overlook told him, and he grinned at Rand.

“If so-and-so happened,” Rand insisted, “it might be critical.”

“I’ll tell you,” said Overlook in a confidential tone, “I never saw a digit yet was worth two years.” And he went away.

This was why Rand, consulting the young woman, said doubtfully, “He’s been working

pretty hard. What do you think? Did that mean anything?"

She was a very efficient young woman. "I have Mr. Jenks' address," she reminded Rand. "We can get Mr. Overlook there." And Rand was reassured by this reminder that Overlook could not escape from them.

Overlook chose to go by car, leaving the Irish chauffeur behind; and he made an early start, the Jap and the Irishman loading bags and cases into the tonneau while he breakfasted. He drove swiftly, with an automatic skill; and it was not yet late afternoon when he threaded his way through Boston and pushed on and was soothed by the rise and fall of the straight and lovely turnpike, without a curve for a score or so of miles. Newburyport and Portsmouth, and then—while dusk fell—the writhing and contorted road to Biddeford and Saco, and into Portland for a late dinner and bed.

In the morning he slept luxuriously till almost ten o'clock, and went on again along the bay shore by the Foreside road, and at Brunswick he turned up the valley of the Kennebec.

There was, from Brunswick onward, something in his nostrils, something dancing before his eyes. The gently rolling countryside had nevertheless its rugged contours, drawn in miniature where an alder run cut sharply into a hillside, or a ledge jutted out above the road; and these bold profiles were like things he had seen and lost long before. When he came into Augusta and a traffic officer halted him at the intersection of two streets, he relaxed under the wheel of the big car with something like a sigh, as though it were a relief to be free for a moment from the long strain of rapid driving, mile on mile.

But though his body slumped and slackened, his eyes were busy; he looked at the passing cars, at the people on the sidewalks, at the names on the store windows; and this scrutiny of his, random yet intent, came to rest at last upon a sign-board set across the way ahead of him.

"East Harbor," he read, half aloud; and he saw below the words a broad arrow, pointing toward the right. He leaned forward more alertly, staring at these painted words, his elbow bent across the steering wheel. His lips twisted,

smiling faintly, and his eyes were filled with a memory.

A broad and spacious wharf, set high on piles above the water of a lovely harbor. Behind, rising steeply up the hillside where the town lay, white houses bright among the green of the trees, and behind the hill above the town, the glowing western sky where clouds banked to hide the sun, while at the same time they transmuted its radiance into gold. A white steamer, her paddles splashing, slipped alongside the wharf, and ropes were thrown and lines were hauled to the mooring bitts; and there was a great deal of confusion and shouting, and people laughing and calling to and fro.

All these people, as Overlook remembered now the scene, knew one another; they addressed one another by their first names, and intimately: "Going to the city, Bill?" "Gone long, Jim?" "Take up on that line, Charlie." "All right, Joe; let 'em come." And "Good-by!" And "Good-by!"

He looked back at the moment now with the

eyes of a spectator, and his attention was all fastened upon the figure of a boy, a young man, a youth perhaps twenty years old. This youngster wore a suit of store clothes curiously rigid, as though starched; he moved within them stiffly, and the high collar irked his neck. The clothes had the stigma of newness upon them, and so had the cocked felt hat the boy wore. He carried a suitcase, and one watching him might have guessed that it was not very heavy. But the thing which struck Overlook's memory now most poignantly was that in this throng of friends and acquaintances the boy moved solitary and alone. No one called good-by to him; no one even laughed at him. And Overlook grinned to himself ruefully, remembering.

The boy had pretended to himself, that day, that he felt no qualms; that he was content to stand alone, conspicuous by this loneliness. But on the boat, Overlook remembered, he had made his way to the public cabin below decks and chosen a bunk on which to sleep, and put his suitcase there; and he sat on the edge of the bunk for a long time, grateful for the half darkness and the isolation, till a faint discomfort from the

vibration of the boat made him seek, by instinct, the open air.

When he came on deck the shore was unfamiliar to his eyes; the town was fallen far behind. And he had never seen East Harbor since that day. Probably little changed, he told himself now; and he smiled at the thought, a little wistfully.

"Sorry, officer," he explained a moment later. The traffic man, impatient because Overlook ignored his signals to advance, had come striding toward the car, shouting, "Well, what are you grinning at? Move on!"

"Sorry, officer," said Overlook, in a friendly way; and he pulled across the intersecting street. But a little way beyond he saw a filling station, and he drew in to the curb and stopped. The car attracted attention. It was long and low, yet massive, too, with the top folded into an envelope in the rear and the tonneau half filled with his dunnage. Two boys stopped to inspect it with explosive admiration, and then a young man came out of the filling station to serve him—a lean young man with a smudgy face.

"Fill her up, will you?" Overlook suggested pleasantly; and the young man nodded and proceeded to remove the cap upon the gas tank and insert the nozzle of the hose.

While he turned the crank, Overlook sat, considering; and when the lean young man returned with his change Overlook pointed back to the signboard at the intersecting ways.

"That the East Harbor road?" he asked.

"Yes," the other replied.

"How is it? Over as far as the Sheepscot?"

"Pretty good, some places," the garage man assured him. "Had a dry summer. They're working on the road over in Palermo, that's all. Sheepscot ain't been so good this year. Not the trout there that there usually is."

Overlook laughed abstractedly. "I wasn't thinking of fishing it," he explained. "Used to live over there—fifteen years ago. I thought I might drive over and have a look at the place. Think I could get back tonight?"

"Sure," the other promised. "Nothing to hinder."

Overlook nodded and pressed the starter.

Even then he sat a moment undecided; but another car pulled in behind him to get gas and blew a warning horn, and he drew ahead a little way. He looked at his watch uncertainly; and at last, still without having come to any conscious decision, he wheeled the car and turned back; and when the traffic officer permitted, he swung into the street indicated by the signboard. He drove at first slowly, still doubtful, still inclined to think his project absurd.

"Jenks will be expecting me tonight," he reminded himself. "I ought to be there." But he added impatiently, "I'm on a vacation. What's the sense of running on schedule all the time? Jenks can wait till tomorrow, I guess, if he wants to."

He had slipped out of the heavier traffic and the way opened now before him; he loosed the car and the engine hummed and he drove ahead along the East Harbor road.

CHAPTER III

WHEN he had left the city behind him Overlook discovered, in the countryside through which his route lay, a long-forgotten loveliness and charm.

On either side of him were wooded lands, broken only here and there by an occasional meadow or garden patch. Old orchards clustered beside the road; he looked down into alder runs; and sometimes his way ran between growths of young pine or hemlock or spruce and his eye found comfort in their heavy, gentle green. Occasionally, from a hilltop, a vista opened out afar before him; beauty he had forgotten hid among these hills. He dipped down to a bridge and across and up through a little village and on; and he came by and by to the road crew at work, and had to crawl in second gear through rods of loose gravel laid on bowlders and not yet bedded down; then wound along a rocky country

road, rising and dipping over spurs and ledges. He drove inattentively; and now and then the road betrayed him, shocking the heavy car. And the miles drifted behind his wheels till at last, without warning, he came to a wide and sluggish stream spanned by a wooden bridge; and he stopped upon the bridge and saw a pond opening below the road, and a boat chained to a tree there; and beyond, half a mile away, a fisherman trolling patiently.

He had a moment's vivid, flashing memory of a summer day when he and Pot Riddle had sneaked down here and borrowed without leave a farmer's skiff and gone a-fishing in the pond. They had but one line between them; a hand line not long enough to be of much account. Pot rowed while he trolled this line over the stern, and then he rowed while Pot held the line. A hot day, with no whisper of wind upon the water, and Pot sweat lavishly; and he himself suffered in almost equal measure during his turn at the oars. They had no bites; and when they got home, late for the chores, each one of them received the punishment of his crime. Overlook, sitting

there upon the bridge, saw for an instant before his eyes the very apple switch his father had used for the occasion; there was a fruit spur halfway along its length which had left its mark upon his legs. Yet he smiled almost gleefully at the memory now.

He stayed only a moment there upon the bridge; he had come upon it unexpectedly, unconsciously calculating distances by the ancient standards of foot traffic or of a plodding horse. Measured by the car, the road seemed to have shrunk enormously. But he knew this bridge, and took his bearings now and located himself, planned what his next move would be. The farm lay some little way upstream—two miles, or three, or four; but there should be, he remembered, a road running in that direction a little distance behind him.

With this in mind, he pulled ahead till he found a chance to turn the car, and so swung back, and retraced his way for perhaps half a mile, till he came to the other road swinging to the right, to the north, paralleling the course of the stream. Along this he took his way.

The road was narrow; it had been scraped to a high crown and it was all of clay. A shower the night before had left it slippery; so Overlook drove with care, choosing to keep in the ruts and avoid a worse fate. He had, after a little while, misgivings; the road was so densely wooded on either side, so little traveled. If an opportunity had afforded he might have turned around and gone back the way he came; but the way was narrow, and he could see that another car had gone before him since the rain, so he pushed on. It was as though he traversed a wilderness; the trees pressed close on either side; and the occasional meadows were overgrown with alder and poplar and birch. A partridge lifted before him and flew a hundred yards down the road through the tunnel of the trees before rising at an angle, with wide wings, to alight in a hemlock there. He crossed a rill of running water and stopped to look down into the basin below the bridge, and saw tiny trout darting to and fro in their alarm; and a mile farther on, he saw great tracks in the clay of the ditch beside the road, where a moose had passed.

Then, abruptly, he came to a house, faintly familiar, about which there were indications of life; and he alighted to ask his way. A woman came to the kitchen door when he knocked there—a woman with a richness in the full lines of her body. A boy child stood at her knee.

"I'm looking for the old Overlook place," he told her, smiling in that friendly fashion which seemed to be his habit. "Things have changed a good deal since I was here last. Am I on the right road at all?"

She nodded gently. "Yes; yes, this is the road. You'll want to take the second road to the right; and it's the first house you'll come to on the left-hand side."

"Far?" he asked, not so much from curiosity as because he wished to hear her low voice again.

"Better'n a mile," she told him.

"I'm Walter Overlook," he explained. "I was going through Augusta, and I thought I'd come over and see the old place." He looked around. "Is this the May place?"

"It used to be," she confessed. "Will Jenison lives here now."

He felt his throat tighten. His mother had been Sarah May; this was her father's farm.

"Ought I to remember you?" he asked after a moment, with that disarming smile.

"I lived over in Fraternity," she said, "before I married Will. Jonathan Clemons was my father."

He made a rueful gesture. "I've been away longer than I thought," he confessed. "Didn't realize how much I'd forgotten. Where's Pot Riddle's? He's got the key to the house, I think."

"He lives across the bridge from the Overlook place," she told him. "You go straight ahead on that same road. The first house you come to."

He withdrew reluctantly, looking back at her. She stood in the doorway to watch him drive away; and when he lifted his hand in farewell she responded in kind, her gesture curiously full of beauty. He was reluctant to go.

Beyond the house he discovered a sloping field under cultivation; and beyond again a meadow, where the hay had been cut, and where no straggling bushes grew. "Jenison's a good farmer," he told himself, "by the look of his farm." He

glanced back toward the house again, remembering the woman; but the barn obscured his vision and he could not see the kitchen door.

At the end of the meadow he crossed a road which seemed to be even less used than this one he was traversing; and then for a while his way lay through thick woods again. Once, on his left, where a stream came down, he caught a glimpse of the collapsing ruins of a disintegrating saw-mill; his grandfather May had owned it, and he remembered how the shriek of its saw used to rasp and wail across the valley; remembered the feel of sawdust between his toes when he came to tunnel in the great yellow pile beside the stream.

"Doesn't take long for things to fall to pieces," he thought, and unconsciously pressed the throttle down as though to hurry on.

Thus by and by he emerged from the cover of the trees and saw on his right, dimly, through the fringe of stuff along the road, a meadow grown with straggling clumps of alder and the winding line of the tree-clad stream beyond. His meadow, the very meadow where he had grubbed

as a boy; and there must lie the pool where he and Pot swam on that summer day. And on other occasions too. One day in haying time a shower caught him and his father with hay cut but not raked, lying across this meadow here; and the next morning they went down to turn it so that it might dry in the sun. The sun was hot and baking; and in the low meadow above the sweating hay the air lay humid and stifling, so that the boy collapsed at last, and the man carried him to the brookside and splashed him with the icy water there. Overlook remembered now, with understanding like a revelation, the fearful anxiety in his father's eyes. At the time he had been full of bitterness at this slave driver of a man, and very sorry for himself; but he felt only a wistful sorrow at the memory now.

He knew his way; did not need to remember Nan Jenison's directions in order to turn to the right at the road beyond the meadow. Ahead of him he saw the wooded rampart of the Sheepscot ridge. He had used to climb that steep way to school at the Corner; he remembered how the ridge had always seemed to him like a curtain

drawn between his eyes and the world toward which he longed, like a prisoning barrier there. Any journey beyond the ridge was an adventure not soon to be forgotten. He had been more than once to Liberty; and three times he had gone as far as Fraternity, ten miles or so beyond. But never to East Harbor till that day after his father's funeral, when he took the boat there and left his youth behind. The ridge seemed to him unchanged, its steep flank bright with the greenery of the hardwoods and the black growth, inscrutable and bland. But he smiled at it now with a faint derision.

"I've crossed you," he said half aloud. "I've been beyond you now—far beyond."

He was driving very slowly, sensitive to every least impression, and he lost all count of time. Once or twice he stopped the car without realizing it, to sit for a moment and look about before rolling on again. The road was sandy, its loose ruts clinging to his tires; he topped a little knoll and turned aside into the farmyard before the house, the house where he was born and where his boyhood lay. Its white paint was faded now;

but it stood staunch and sound, the ridgepole straightly proud.

"In pretty good shape," he told himself approvingly. "Built to last, this old house was." And he went wandering among his memories.

He remembered his grandfather, his father's father; remembered him as an old man whose white beard was faintly stained with brown, sitting on the sunny kitchen porch on an October day with a shawl about his shoulders. There was a boy on the porch floor beside him, bare legs dangling over the edge. Overlook could see this boy quite plainly, and he was amused at the impersonality of the picture.

"As though I weren't that boy any more," he thought, and his amusement vanished. The thought sobered him.

His grandfather told him, he remembered, that the house was fifty years old that October day; and while he listened breathlessly, the old man in mumbling sentences told the ancient tale. Overlook tried to recall that story now. The

original house and barn, he was sure, had been struck by lightning and burned to the ground. Such a catastrophe nowadays would be likely to mean an abandoned farm, but at that time there had been nowhere else for them to go.

"We lived most anyways for a spell," the old man said.

The story, Overlook found, had impressed itself upon his mind, came back to him in more and more detail. The fire occurred in July, he remembered; and the women of the family were taken in by Pot Riddle's grandfather, while the men—his grandfather and his great-grandfather—knocked together a rude shack out of half-burned lumber and cleared the cellar and prepared to rebuild, working late into the night by lantern, doing their chores and their farmwork through the day. Some of the heat of that race against time was in Overlook's blood now. Sawed lumber came from Joel May's mill; and Nat Haradeen and Hepperton helped when they could, coming down from the Corner up over the ridge.

"Your great-grandfather wouldn't have any

sawed lumber for the sills and timbers," the old man said. "It cost; but that weren't all the reason. He 'lowed it wouldn't stand up." So they hewed the great logs foursquare and framed the house with mortise and tenon, and pinned it stoutly. "Pegged all over," said the old man, mumbling proudly, the glow of an ancient ardor in his eye. "Built honest, it was, and built to stay."

And he chuckled in his beard. "Your great-grandmother, she moved in before it was done," he explained. "This day fifty year. She was sick of Mis' Riddle's housekeeping, and nothing would do her but she'd move soon's the roof was on. This day fifty year."

He nodded as though to confirm his own statements, and then he had drifted off into memories of his own. The boy did not care; there was a chipmunk carrying acorns from an oak around the corner of the house into a crevice in the stones about the well, three acorns at every trip, one in either cheek and one in its mouth besides. And the boy wondered whether he could put three apples into his own mouth in like fashion, and strayed off toward the orchard to make the ex-

periment. The experiment was a failure, but it had its compensations.

And Overlook remembered his father. It seemed to him, remembering, that during his boyhood they had been forever making some small repair or other upon the house—new shingles here and there, a leak about the chimney, a rotting sill under the shed where the weather got in. He had been inclined to rebel at this care on his father's part; his own revolt against the farm, the life here, the isolation behind that high and forbidding ridge to the eastward, had been so constant and persistent as to color all his days. He wished to see the house decay and disintegrate; had even his longing to set it all afire. But his father had tended it, kept it sound and secure till the day he died.

Overlook remembered the day his father died. His mother was dead years before; and for a while his father's sister, Aunt Millie, lived with them, till she and his father quarreled. So for four or five years he and his father had been like bachelors here, cooking, washing, scrubbing for themselves. And the boy, on the brink of man-

hood, already feeling himself a man, was fuming and stewing and planning, flogging his courage to the point of open challenge. And then one morning when he came in from the milking and the chores, it was to find the fire unlighted, the kitchen still cold, his father still abed. And at first, when Walter looked in upon him, he thought the older man was sleeping; but he was dead. Some fifty-three years old, and hale and sound. Only, a fortnight or so before, he had fallen heavily upon his knee, bruising it so that a great clot formed beneath the skin. In later understanding Overlook found in the incident the explanation of the death that had been so mysteriously sudden then.

It was four days later that he went away, mounted the ridge for the last time, went forth full of eagerness to face the world, not even looking backward, not in the least timorously or regretfully.

His father lay beside his mother and the others in the little family burying ground up toward the hemlock growth behind the orchard; and Overlook, remembering, thought he must walk

up to the spot and see that it was tended now.

He realized that the engine of his car was still idling, and he switched it off and stepped to the ground, looked at his watch again. "I'll have to hurry," he decided. "Can't stay but a little while. Already wasted quite a lot of time." And he moved across the farmyard toward the great barn.

CHAPTER IV

POT RIDDLE was his agent here; and Overlook, turning his eye this way and that, decided that Pot was a careful man, worthy to be trusted. The shutters of the house were closed, the doors were protected by outer doors of rough boards, and the barn itself was padlocked and secure.

Pot had said that the hay was cut and stowed away; and Overlook, peering through a crevice between the doors, could see it piled high among the great beams. In the vaulted cavern of the roof swallows moved with little twittering cries; and he marked where the birds perched like beads along the telephone wire beside the road, preparing for the southward flight so soon to come. There had always been swallows in the great barn; would be, he supposed, as long as the barn should stand. Almost the first birds to arrive, always the first to go. Something familiar and

friendly about them. One of them swooped past his head and he had a curious feeling that the bird was inspecting him. It returned to its place upon the wire; and the others there rose and settled nearer, and there was great conversation among them. Overlook, watching, chuckled softly.

He wanted to go inside the barn, and he wanted, he remembered, to go inside the house. But house and barn were locked and Pot Riddle had the keys, and Pot lived over across the Sheepscot on the lower slopes of the ridge. Overlook turned back to his car and started the engine and set out to fetch the key from Pot Riddle's.

The road by which he now traveled seemed very little used; there were two wheel tracks, and between them a rut beaten by the feet of horses. But grass grew inside the wheel tracks; and Overlook, examining the way before him, saw that no one had passed since the rain of the night before. When he came to the bridge across the Sheepscot he checked his car to look downstream at the great pool between the alders there. Trout

had used to lie in that pool, he remembered; and while he watched he saw the surface of the water dimpled now and then when a fish rose. At first his heart leaped at this sight; then the lore of his boyhood returned to him.

"Chubs," he said reluctantly. "That's what they are."

At the foot of the pool, there was a little sand bar, and he saw that it was marked with footprints. "Boys come fishing here," he guessed, and drove on up the road, which now began to climb. So he came to Pot Riddle's.

The farmhouse, once white, now weatherbeaten to a desolate gray, stood some distance from the road, back against the hardwood growth which crept down the flank of the ridge. Two wheel tracks led to the farmyard, and Overlook's great car crept along these tracks and swung upon the turf before the house and stopped there; and he alighted and went around toward the kitchen door.

As he put his foot on the lowest step a woman appeared at the door and stood there, within the screen, looking at him. She moved so quietly

that he was faintly startled by her appearance, and he took off his hat with a quick smile. But he did not at once ask the question for which he had come; something about her held him still while their eyes encountered.

She was, outwardly, such a woman as he must have expected to find upon this lonely farm. Another might have seen in her such a woman, nothing more. For another's eye she might in fact have been no more than this. But Overlook had an eye alert and keen, and when her glance rested upon his countenance it seemed to him she checked where she stood. He thought she had meant to come out upon the porch, until she saw him, and stopped very still and stood very still within the screen there. He wondered at this, his quick conjectures racing even while he looked at her; and though his eyes rested upon her eyes, he saw her whole and entire. Her garment was of faded blue and very clean; it clothed her fully and without particularity. One might have forgotten that she was a woman but for the clear line of her neck and shoulders, and but for her eyes.

Her eyes were blue; a curious mild blue, serene and deep as the sky on a summer's afternoon. And there was a calmness about her lips; he thought of rounded, green-clad hills asleep in the dawn. And her hair was calm and fair, lying severely in its heavy bands; and as she stood within the shadow of the door the serenity in her lips and in her eyes withdrew in mystery there, as though, remotely, she dreamed of hidden things.

His glance held hers so attentively that for a long moment he knew nothing else besides; then something moved against her knee, and he looked down and saw a little girl—a little girl perhaps three years old—who met his eyes and then buried her face in the woman's skirts. The woman let her hand rest sweetly on the baby's head; and Overlook smiled again, and spoke to her in a doubtful tone.

"Isn't this the Riddle place?" he asked.

She nodded, and so spoke for the first time. "Yes," she agreed, and her voice was low and sure.

"I wanted to get the keys from you," he explained—"the keys to the Overlook place, back

across the bridge. You've got them here, haven't you?"

"Yes; Pot takes care around there," she told him. "The keys are here."

"I used to live there," he volunteered. "Pot knows me. I'm Walter Overlook. I went away from here when my father died."

She smiled inscrutably. "I know," she reminded him; and so he recognized her and he cried, "I know you now. You're June Hara-deen."

"Yes," she agreed; and she added, "I didn't know as you'd remember. But I remember you."

"You weren't more than a kid," he said defensively. "You've grown up now."

"You've changed some yourself," she told him gently; and he was vaguely uncomfortable; and he had a surprising feeling that she knew this, that she looked at him in such wise, spoke in such fashion with the intent to discomfit him. He shook his head, laughing the thought aside. There could be no coquetry in such a woman. A farm woman, nothing more. A certain serenity and poise about her, perhaps; but for all that,

a woman of the farms. Immured between the steep ridge on one side, the stream and the deserted valley on the other, in this desolate gray house upon a remote and hidden road. There could be neither beauty nor mystery in such a woman. Yet—"You've changed some yourself," she had said in that faintly derisive tone.

"Yes," he agreed, laughing a little, uncomfortably. "Yes, I've changed. But things don't change much here, except the farms are abandoned, the meadows go back into wilderness again." There was, to his own surprise, faint sorrow in his tone.

"There's little to bring you," she suggested, and he found himself explaining.

"It was an accident," he confessed. "I was on my way up into the woods, fishing. First vacation I've taken since I went away. Never thought of coming past here till I saw the East Harbor signboard in Augusta. Then I thought I'd just look in at the old place. I'll be going back to-night," he added; and knew, incredulously, that there was something like defiant bravado in his tone.

She nodded slowly. "Likely you will," she agreed, and stood a moment, and then stooped and swept the little girl up into her arms with a strong gesture; her body bowed and lifted with the ease and grace to be expected in a creature of the wilderness; the child fitted into her shoulder, pressed against her bosom there. Her arms held it broodingly. "I'll fetch the keys," she said, and withdrew from the door, returning a moment later to come out to him. "This is the padlock on the barn," she explained. "And this one is the kitchen door of the house. You can leave them in the kitchen, on the table. Pot'll go over tonight or in the morning and lock up again."

He felt himself dismissed; was vaguely affronted by this dismissal, and made to feel negligible and of small account. And he laughed a little at the humor of this. "I might decide to stay the night," he announced defiantly.

She smiled. "I guess you ain't likely to," she commented.

"Where is Pot?" he asked.

"Gone to the Corner," she explained. "He'll be back any time now."

He still hesitated, wishing to hold her, unwilling to go. "Remember when we went to school up at the Corner?" he asked. "You used to live in the house just this side. Why, I remember the first day you came to school! I must have been pretty near ten years old, and you weren't much bigger than the little girl in the kitchen there. I remember you brought a doll to school, and what a baby I thought you were."

"Most boys never do see the sense in dolls," she said gravely; and he drew back, abashed as though he had inadvertently looked behind a veil. Hesitated for a moment, spoke in another tone.

"If I should happen to want to stay overnight, could I get something to eat from you?" he asked.

"You're welcome to what we got," she told him.

"Oh, I don't mean to bother you," he urged. "I thought I might buy some eggs and milk and bread and things."

"I guess you can do that way if you'd ruther." Her head turned a little, attentive to some sound within the house. "There's the baby," she said; and with a little nod, she left him, disappeared within the kitchen again.

He stood a moment uncertainly, then turned to his car and got in and backed and filled till he was headed toward the road. So drove away. And at first his eyes were fixed and thoughtful; but when he came to the bridge, abruptly he laughed a little to himself, not so much with amusement as with interest, not so much mirthfully as in a curious exhilaration.

"I've a notion to stay here a day or two, at that," he said, half aloud. He had stopped his car on the bridge, and a blue jay swooped into the gray birch above his head and screamed at him scoldingly. The bird reminded him of Jenks, and he laughed.

"Jenks will be wild," he remembered. But added a moment later, seriously again, "Just the same, I've a mind to stay."

CHAPTER V

HE drove into his own farmyard again, and stilled the engine and fitted one of the keys into the kitchen door. It swung before him and he entered; entered the kitchen where for twenty years or so his life had all been focused. And at first the place seemed to him gloomy and forbidding; but he opened the windows and swung back the shutters and admitted the sun; and then he stood for a space and looked this way and that, his lips parted in a little smile.

There was the stove—that stove which had seemed to him, when he was a boy, an insatiable monster, devouring endless quantities of wood which must be painfully cut and split and carried by his small hands. And behind it, hanging against the wall, the soapstone griddle upon which they had used to fry buckwheat cakes in the winter mornings. And against the door the

roller where the towel had hung, grimed so quickly by his brief ablutions. He chuckled at the thought; remembered how on Saturday nights he had been used to fetch a tub from the shed and set it on the floor, and dip into it water from the tank at the end of the stove and add cold water from the pump in the shed, and scrub away the week's accumulated veneer. The memory made him unlock the shed door and look in; and the very tub still hung against the studding there, cracks between its staves opened by long disuse. The washbasin hung on its nail at the end of the iron sink, the separator stood at one side. There was a mirror on the wall, the mercury upon its back flaking off, and he looked into it and saw himself distorted; and then at a sudden thought fumbled behind the mirror and found the very comb he once had used. An aluminum comb, corroded by time, no longer fit for its appointed function.

The corrosion of this comb, undiscovered in its hiding place, made him realize that there should be elsewhere evidences of this same rusting and decay. He was faintly astonished to dis-

cover that this was not the case. Overlook had had little experience of old abandoned farm-houses; he could not guess how quickly, if they are neglected, they fill up with disorderly litter, and how dust lies over all, and everywhere dwell dampness and decay. Nevertheless, his common sense told him that there should be even here some evidences of the waste of time. But there was only a faint film of dust. The oilcloth cover on the table revealed it, and there was dust on the dishes in the pantry. His attention was alert now; he saw that the stove was polished, that the sink was greased and free from rust; and when he investigated elsewhere he found the dining-room table ordered and clean, the airtight stove free of ashes and the chimney pipe removed and—he suspected—cleaned of soot and put away. Across the couch a protecting sheet was laid, and there were newspapers spread over the rug on the floor. In the parlor other sheets were draped over the chairs and over the ancient organ and along the shelves above the table where his father's few books were. And in the bedrooms, when he went so far, he found the beds stripped,

bedding neatly piled at the foot and covered over there, and his astonishment waxed and grew.

"House looks as though it had just been shut up for the summer," he told himself. "You'd never think it had been shut fifteen years." And he went further. "Someone has fixed things," he exclaimed. "Cleaned up and covered things up, and so on. I didn't leave them so."

And abruptly he began to understand. The woman, he thought, must have done this. Pot took care of the farm, cut the hay and stowed it and sold it, made minor repairs to roof and broken windows. But she must have assumed charge of the interior of the house. He wondered why. It was not, he thought, the sort of thing to be expected of her or of any dull farm woman immured here so far from the world. She may have been actuated by a mere hunger for neatness and for order.

Overlook remembered that his mother had been like that; he knew there were such women. Yet even this explanation did not seem to him to be sufficient; he sought for another, and abruptly he smiled.

"She knew me today," he reminded himself.

"She remembered me!"

He was amused to find his heart quickening at the thought, and he laughed again.

"By George!" he exclaimed. His eyes became fixed and thoughtful, recalling her for his renewed inspection.

"She'd be handsome!" he told himself. And then he began to think back, trying to remember what she had been like as a child.

He remembered the first day she came to school. She came with her older sister, with May Haradeen. Jim Haradeen was their father, and they lived just over the crest of the ridge toward the Corner; so that when Walter Overlook climbed the ridge and passed their house May used sometimes to follow him to school—follow him because, since he was a boy, he would not appear to have her at his side, and so strode boldly on ahead, the little girl, meekly, somewhat in the rear. There were three of the Haradeen children; March was the oldest, a boy about Walter's own age. But he died while they were

children. Then came May and June. Haradeen, folks used to say, was a great hand for months. And one day in late fall May brought her little sister to school.

June must have been four or five years younger than himself, Overlook calculated. He had a vague mental picture of two pigtails, thick as small clubs, hanging over her shoulders; and he remembered that her eyes were big, with a look in them peculiarly limpid and kindly. And they had found, in the course of the first two or three years of her schooling, that she was painfully shy. If the master chided her she wept; if any of the older boys took of her more than passing notice she cowered and drew away. Yet there was, he thought, a maturity about her even then; she seemed a wise, old little thing, and she had freckles on her nose. His recollections ranged this way and that; he delved into forgotten corners of his memory, seeking new glimpses of her.

And then a scene, a picture, sprang into his mind abruptly, like a revelation. He and Pot Riddle and Will Hepperton one day, starting

home from school, and they overtook May and June; and he remembered that for some reason, as children will, he and Pot and Will and May all began to jeer at June, the littlest of them all, deriding her in that nasal singsong fashion which so torments small nerves. Overlook could not recall how the thing developed; but he did remember quite vividly that of a sudden Pot declared he was going to kiss her, and June started to run; and then, of course, they all pursued her. And May's sisterly affections at last awoke and she became June's partisan. June had run like a poor scuttling little rabbit, her short legs stumbling; but Pot overtook her and kissed her while Will Hepperton held May away. And then Will kissed her, June struggling against him with a frantic and a desperate fury, and May screaming at them both. And then Overlook found the little girl thrust into his grasp, and he held her uncertainly while Will and Pot combined against May.

He was watching them; and it was a moment before he realized that he had June and was to kiss her. He had her, ineptly, by the arm; but

though she had fought and scratched and kicked at the two others, when he looked at her now he saw that she was quiet, was watching him with those wide eyes of hers; and he remembered that she had been panting, her square little chest rising and falling, her mouth open. He realized how small she was, and in what vast distress; and so he forbore and let her go, and whispered, "Go on, run!"

She looked at him for a moment, something baffling in her eyes, a slow confusion rising there; and then she began to cry, and she turned and fled away. And he had swung to help May escape from the others; and thereafter the two sisters walked home half a dozen rods ahead of the boys, May shouting back jeers at them, Pot and Will responding.

But Walter had been quiet, disturbed, feeling vaguely that he had failed to play a man's part, that he had been weakly overkind.

He remembered that June cried all the way to the Haradeen house and did not come to school next day.

But when she did return, though she showed

no more than her former aversion to Pot and Will and the other boys, she seldom looked at him at all.

Standing there in what had been his father's bedroom, Overlook abruptly chuckled with understanding.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "Yes, sir! She wanted me to kiss her that day. She wanted me to!" And he laughed aloud, intoxicated. And he looked around the ordered room once more and decided that this mystery was solved. "No wonder she remembered me!"

Nothing so immediately and powerfully attracts a man to a woman as the discovery that she is interested in him. He may have lived across the street from her for years and never regarded her or found in her any appealing trait; but if someone suggests to him that she has a tenderness in his behalf, the man is bound to seek to warm himself at that fire. She may be too young or too old, too fat or too thin, too beautiful or too plain; but if she loves him, he is bound to investigate the matter; and if she loves him

enough he is more like than not to settle comfortably into the niche prepared in her heart and rest there—for a while, if not for always.

Thus now this Overlook. Because it seemed to him that June Haradeen had, on that afternoon some twenty-odd years before, wanted him to kiss her, he decided to stay here, at least overnight. There was no formal purpose back of this decision; he did not avow to himself the thought that here in this desolate and lonely little valley romance might be waiting for him. He was simply amused and flattered and curious, and he decided to stay.

“Just to see what she’ll do,” he thought gleefully. He would drive to the Corner for supplies, leave it to her to make the first move. “She’ll be over,” he assured himself. “She’ll tell Pot he has to come and get the keys; and if he won’t come she’ll come alone; and if he comes she’ll come along.”

He had for a moment some misgivings, thought perhaps he ought to get back to his schedule, thought of the impatient Jenks waiting

a hundred miles or so away. Then shook his head.

"Let him wait," he said aloud. "This is vacation for me; I'm going to do as I choose. I can rest here just as well as in a boat on some lake or other."

He might even, he assured himself, stay two days if he chose; and he opened more windows, letting in the sun of the late afternoon. It came so pleasantly that he left the windows open and went out-of-doors, and the warm wind flowed up the valley, caressing him. He realized for the first time how still it was; the world was infinitely remote and far away. Before him, the meadow, baking in the sun, distilled its fragrance for the wind to bear to him, and all about the woodlands lay; and to the east the ridge like a wall shut off the colder winds that might come from the sea. There was a persistent little murmur in the air; he tried for long to put a name to it, remembered at last that it must be the voice of the quick water in the fringe of the wood, a quarter of a mile upstream from where he lay.

He had stretched on his back in the cool green grass under a maple by the dooryard. The ground was damp beneath him, but he did not care; his eyes, open, looked upward into the sweet and sun-flecked cavern of the leaves, and he discovered life there. An insect like a twig, with long twiglike legs, discoverable only when it moved; an undulating black-and-yellow caterpillar on business of its own; a thing like a plaque of green on the under side of a green leaf which it devoured. His lids drooped a little, dreamily; and a small finch of some kind fluttered into the tree, looked down at him with head on one side, spoke to him in a doubtful tone, and then dismissed him from its mind and proceeded to scan the branches and the twigs, picking out from their interstices other insects so minute that they had escaped Overlook's eye. Overhead, to one side of the outer branches of the tree, a great white cloud drifted; he watched it till it was obscured from his vision by the tree above him; saw it presently emerge again upon the other side and go off across the ridge toward the sea.

He was completely relaxed and comfortable;

and he thought of that moment so many years ago when he had not kissed June Haradeen, though she wished him to. The memory pleased him.

It was not till a little later that he sat up under the abrupt and disturbing impact of a new thought. Pot Riddle had kissed her that day—kissed her though she fought against him. Yet obviously, Overlook now remembered, she had married Pot, after all!

CHAPTER VI

THIS fundamental fact that June Haradeen had married Pot Riddle struck Overlook like a blow; then the irony of it made him laugh in a fashion wholly mirthless. And his memory went wandering again, back to that day when June first came to school with a doll upon her arm, holding May by the hand; to that other day when Pot and Will pursued and caught and kissed her and he forbore. Old Jim Haradeen had heard of that affair, he remembered, and Pot had a whipping from his father as a result of it. Old Jim must be still alive, Overlook thought; he could not be so very old even now.

"I'll look him up tomorrow," he decided, and forgot Jim then to think of June again—June, clinging to the hand of May, a doll upon her other arm, and her shy still eyes.

He remembered, ever so keenly, the look he had caught in her eyes at the moment when Pot

Riddle kissed her. It was that look which made him, a moment later, forbear his own kiss; he had been afraid she would look so at him, and he was ashamed for Pot's sake because she had looked at Pot in that wise. "Pot" was a curious name, he thought. Short, perhaps, for Potiphar. There was a Potiphar, he seemed to remember, in the Bible; and that Potiphar had a wife who lived under the burden of a disrepute the nature of which was at the moment vague to Overlook. But he forgot Potiphar's wife now in trying to marshal his memories of Potiphar—Pot Riddle. He had been a stout boy, in fact a fat boy, and rather more disheveled than most boys, and rather more grimy.

"He must have changed," Overlook decided, "or June would never have married him." And then he thought: "But she had to marry somebody, I suppose. And there aren't many men about here." And he remembered so poignantly how she had looked at Pot that day so long ago, and he began to pity her profoundly and to wonder whether she ever looked at Pot in that wise now.

He had not seen Pot for so many years, and his curiosity about the man began to be acute. He formed a mental picture of a rather fat and decidedly indolent farmer, idling through the days; he seemed to see Pot whittling contentedly upon a doorstep somewhere.

"But his place is kept up pretty well," he remembered. "Except that it needs paint." And then he thought June must be responsible for any thriftiness and order Pot's farm might evidence. "I expect she drives him," he decided. "I expect she keeps things up the way she did here."

The sun was drooping toward the westward hills and long shadows began to encroach upon the margin of the meadow at his feet. The wind had dropped to a whisper; and there was a little singing in the air, a faint humming murmur, a compound of many little sounds—the far chuckle of the brook, the note of a distant bird, the susurrant song of the pines. It was so still that now and then, far down the valley, he heard a hollow rumble when a car crossed one of the lower bridges, miles away; but these remote sounds

only accentuated the isolation here. Over across the brook toward Pot's farm a cowbell sounded lazily; and beyond, somewhere atop the ridge, there was a barking dog. The very clouds in the sky were bland and calm.

Overlook got up at last from the ground there beneath the maple; it began, even on this summer afternoon, to be damp and chilly there. He found his limbs cramped and stiff, and he stretched to loosen them. Then he went toward the car, drawn into the farmyard beside the road; and he stood a moment doubtfully, tempted—since she had married Pot Riddle, after all—to get in and drive away and meet Jenks as he had planned. But he was curious to see Pot, and it was very still and peaceful here, and he was tired. He went into the kitchen again; and he noticed that the knob on the door turned loosely, that the screw needed tightening. His father, he remembered, had kept certain household tools in a wall cabinet in the shed, and Overlook went that way and found a screw driver in its appointed slot and returned and tightend the screw. He felt a curious satisfaction in the performance of this

small task, a curious pride in putting the tool securely away again.

He thought it might not be feasible to stay here, thought the bedding might be damp and moldy; but when he unfolded the blankets on his own bed he found them dry and sweet. He could roll up in them and be, for one night, comfortable enough. The orderliness of the house struck him with renewed force.

"Doesn't seem possible," he thought, "that no one has lived here for fifteen years." And he added, smiling, "It's a good deal cleaner than when I went away. Been swept and scoured since the last time I washed dishes here."

And he thought then, with final resolution, "I used to keep house. I can do it again, for a night." So went out to his car and proceeded to unload it. There were two or three bags, besides tackle box and rod case. He left them all in the kitchen, save one bag whose contents he would need. This he unpacked, laying his razors and the like upon the shelf above the sink; and abruptly he smiled, remembering with what precision his Jap had of late done such tasks on his

account. There was no hook convenient for his strop; he found a nail and a hammer in the shed and set the nail where it should be, put his brushes, his soap, his comb neatly side by side; and he found the memory of the Jap's efficiency curiously dimming and losing itself in the foggy background of the past. It was scarce thirty-six hours since the little man had served him last; it seemed an infinite time.

He came back to the present, brushed his other life aside. New York and his apartment were a good many miles away.

"They can be farther for all I care," he told himself, exhilaration mounting in his veins again. In the bedroom, he laid his pajamas, neatly folded, upon the bare mattress, and he draped his dressing gown across the foot of the bed and set his slippers side by side upon the floor. "I'm as good a valet as he is," he thought, chuckling; and he added, "and lots better company."

When he was unpacked he remembered that he must go to the Corner for supplies; had a momentary thought that the store there would soon be closing, and then laughed at himself, re-

membering. It would be open—unless times had changed—till the mail came, and for a while after; the men of the town would gather there unless times had changed; and Overlook did not believe that change had come to these hills, unless they were perhaps a little quieter, a little more deserted, a little more like the wilderness.

But when he went to the store he must know what he needed, and he stopped to consider this. Coffee and sugar and cream. Condensed milk would do. Fruit of some kind. "Chances are they haven't anything of the sort," he remembered. Bacon, eggs, bread; perhaps a prepared cereal breakfast food if there was cream available. Steak was a possibility, and vegetables of one sort or another. He smiled.

"I'm planning enough for an army," he told himself. "All I want is supper and breakfast. But I'm hungry, at that." He had eaten no luncheon, forgotten it in the interest of the day. "A steak would be first-rate," he decided.

The question of cooking utensils occurred to him; he examined the pantry and the cupboard under the mixing board. There were frying pans

and pots and kettles in plenty. Fuel? He discovered a sufficient litter of wood in the shed to serve him for this little while. He was about to set out when he remembered the necessity for light of some kind. There were lamps on the mantel in the dining room, a little row of them. But he found that they had been emptied of oil, and there was no oil in the can in the shed. He entered oil on his mental list of things required, and matches, and he added salt and pepper and butter with a certain pride in the completeness of his forethought.

He tried the pump in the shed and found it raised no water; it had needed to be primed, he remembered. There was no water nearer than the brook, two or three hundred yards away; but he took a pail and went down the road to the bridge and climbed down to the water's edge where the roots of the gray birch formed a ladder. A trout of some size was lying under the roots, darted away into the deeper water, and Overlook felt a quick thrill like that of recognition. He had caught trout under that tree before. . . . He filled his pail and walked back up the

road, and he thought, "Might have run down in the car!" And he smiled at the absurdity of this.

"Just the same, I'd have taken a taxi to go three blocks in New York half the time," he chuckled.

Somewhere in the thick wood across the brook behind him a thrush sang, uttering its sweet, silver call with that curious lilt and cadence which make you picture the bird swinging as it sings upon a slender bough. And from the sky a hoarse cry came down to him, and he looked up and saw a flock of crows passing over in wide extended order; and a chipmunk was busy in the stone wall—ruined now and scattered by the frost—which ran beside the road. The shadows were lengthening across the meadow; he stopped to look down its length toward the dark woodland, and he saw something move in the far shadows there, something humped and black and gigantic. A moose, he knew; and he stood still for a moment, trembling at this revelation of the wood. His heart pounded with a curiously suffocating sweetness.

He laughed the feeling aside. "I could see a moose in the Bronx," he told himself. Added, "Probably." Nevertheless, he watched the creature half a mile away till it faded into the alders again.

The pump, receiving the water he poured down its throat, responded to his efforts; but its first stream was rusty. Nevertheless, he persisted, and eventually the water ran clear, and he filled the pail afresh and tasted of the water. It had a certain flavor of iron, and this taste upon his tongue brought back vividly the past. His father had meant to put in a new pipe, had never done so. He stood a moment there in the shed, and it seemed to him he heard a movement in the kitchen, and for a little he half expected to hear his father call. But when he went in, with the pail in his hand, the kitchen was empty, as he had known it would be.

He was ready, he decided, to go to the Corner; and he went out to the car and started the engine and backed into the road. But he was in no haste; he permitted the powerful machine to roll easily toward the bridge. Its movement was almost com-

pletely silent. The engine murmured, the great tires slithered in the sand. Then the bridge rumbled a little under his passing, and thereafter the tires made a little hissing, sucking sound, and he realized that the road here was of clay, wetted by last night's rain. It would not be surprising if he found the road to the Corner in bad condition. It never had been good—must be neglected now.

His anticipations in this respect were immediately realized, for he had scarce passed Pot's farm—there was no one in sight about the house, though he looked that way—when the grade stiffened and the way became rough and the car began to complain. He was in the wood now, oak and beech and maple thick on either hand, the dying sun almost excluded by their foliage. And the road was rough even beyond his anticipations. Boulders half as big as the wheels of his car had been washed clear in the roadbed by scouring rains; there were ruts hub-deep here and there, and across these ruts sharp ledges laid a barricade, over which the wheels climbed lumberingly, to fall heavily back into the ruts again.

Now and then, in the muck, they showed a tendency to spin.

The road climbed steadily, with here and there a steeper pitch. Usually the wash of the rains gave good footing on these steep rises. He kept in the little gullies where the water ran, where shards and fragments of granite gave a firm holding ground. But he came by and by to one ascent steeper than the others, like the slope of a roof; and here the surface was all blue clay, slippery as ice; and the road immediately at the foot of the rise was so rough as to preclude any possibility of taking a running start. He slipped into low gear and began the climb, and when he was halfway up the little pitch his driving wheels began to spin. Instantly, as though flung by some force outside itself, the rear end of the car slued sidewise and dropped despondently, the right-hand wheel falling into a ditch there. And it came to rest with an impact astonishingly harsh, so that even before Overlook alighted to inspect the situation, he was prepared for what he found.

The wheel had fallen into the ditch over the

edge of a flat boulder; the differential had descended upon another and more jagged bit of rock, a part of the underlying ledge. And there was a crack in the differential casing, through which grease began to ooze.

Overlook, crouching to look under the car, felt a moment's bitter flare of anger, and then philosophy returned to him. He stood up, and in the wood to the right of the road a thrush sang; and he took off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair.

And then he thought of Jenks, waiting impatiently for his arrival at the rendezvous. Jenks was an enthusiastic and an impatient little man, and at thought of him Overlook laughed aloud.

CHAPTER VII

THE day was drawing on; the sun, across the valley behind him, was fallen so low that its rays, darting through the foliage above his head, came almost horizontal through the wood. If he were to get to the village and back before dark, he must walk, and he must go swiftly. But Overlook seemed in no hurry; his first irritation at the mishap had passed like the flare of a match which explodes into flame when it is drawn across the box, hissing and sputtering venomously, and then quiets into a steady even burning, and so slowly dies. And with a motion not unlike the lazy contortion of the match when it is burned, Overlook sat down upon a bowlder across the ditch and relaxed there, looking disapprovingly at this great car of his.

"You're a big thing," he said in faint derision. "Very proud and haughty in your time, pretending to be so swift and scornful. But give you a

little patch of mud under your tires and you lie down and pant like a fat hog."

This reminded him that the engine was still running, and he rose and switched off the ignition and sat down again, and he took a pipe from his pocket and filled it. The car, sprawling drunkenly aslant the road, one wheel like a broken leg dragging in the ditch, seemed to have something sheepish in its bearing; the headlights looked at him askance, like the eyes of a dog when it is scolded. And Overlook found himself enjoying the situation, amused at the apparent chagrin of this beautiful car of his.

"You're all right when they build nice roads for you," he said disapprovingly. "But when you have to stand on your own feet you're no good at all."

And he wondered if what was true of the car was also true of him, and he looked up the steep road through the wood. It had been, he remembered, a long walk from his house to the school at the Corner. Sometimes the snow was deep and drifted, the road not broken out; and he used to go on snowshoes, and Pot Riddle would join

him when he passed the farm this side of the bridge; and they fought their way over the drifts and hummocks of the snow.

"I'd not like tackling that climb in the snow today," he thought. "It must be two or three miles to the Corner." And he laughed, a little grimly. "You're as useless as this car of yours," he told himself, "when you're on your own."

It occurred to him that he ought to be doing something, bestirring himself. But there were half a dozen thrushes singing in the hardwoods now, and the dusk was very still and utterly serene; and the last of the sun, striking through an opening among the boughs, warmed him pleasantly. He was a man who lived in haste, his minutes all engaged; but there was, save for the matter of eventual victuals, no haste here. The car could not be moved tonight; there would hardly be, he thought, any appropriate equipment within miles. It must lie here for the present, even though it blocked the road.

"No one likely to want to get by," he decided.

And then he heard someone coming up the

road toward him; heard the murmur of a rolling pebble and the grate of a stone under a man's boot, and Pot Riddle appeared at the foot of the little grade.

Overlook knew Pot at once—knew him with a faint sensation of surprise that Pot looked exactly as he always had. And a moment later he saw that this was not true at all; that Pot had changed. The man had shrunk. Pot had been a stocky boy, a stout boy and of decent stature, full as tall as Overlook himself. But now, even while the other approached and before they stood eye to eye, Overlook saw that Pot was three or four inches shorter than himself, and the suggestion of chubbiness which as a boy he had worn was gone. He was still a square fashion of a man, but that was all. His softness was gone; he was contracted and concentrated, and someone had lopped three inches off his height. Overlook, keenly appraising him, decided that this only appeared to be so; that the appearance resulted from Pot's slight stoop. He had risen as the other approached, taken a swift step to meet this boy with whom once he had disported, and he ex-

tended his hand and spoke in that friendly wise which was his custom.

"Pot, old man," he cried, "I'm glad to see you."

Pot nodded. His handclasp was strong, but his accent was mild and quite without emphasis. "How do, Walter," he returned. "June said you was back."

"I was going through Augusta," Overlook explained, a little hurriedly. June had married Pot—married this stooped, chunky little man! He forced loyalty into his voice. "Couldn't go by without stopping over. First vacation I've had in fifteen years, Pot."

Pot eyed the great car. "Stuck, ain't you?" he inquired dispassionately.

Overlook laughed. "Well, what would you say?"

"Pile of cars get stuck here, take it all through the summer," Pot explained resignedly. "Looks like they'd learn. They come down the hill, come fishing, and you'd think they'd see what it's like and know enough to go around."

"I came in the other way," Overlook explained

defensively. "The road wasn't quite so bad last time I was over it. I was going to the Corner for some supplies."

Pot eyed him. "Figured to stay a spell, did you?"

"Thought I'd stay overnight," Overlook assented. "I hadn't planned to; but—it's a long time since I was here; maybe a long time till I come again. I might as well look around." He nodded toward the car. "Now I'll have to stay till I get that fixed up. Cracked the differential."

"Might as well come down to my place and eat," Pot suggested. "June'd like having you. We heard you stop here—kind of figured you'd probably got stuck. She sent me up to see."

Overlook held his lips steady, but his heart lifted its beat. "We'll have to jack the car up," he remarked; "get it out of the road."

"Won't be anybody by here tonight," Pot assured him. "Unless it might be a team, and they can get around. I can bring up the old horse and drag you out of there, down the hill if you want though."

Overlook glanced at the western sky. "Looks

like good weather," he commented. "Won't hurt the car to sit there overnight as long as it doesn't rain."

"June was dishing up supper when I left the house," Pot suggested, and Overlook smiled and turned down the hill.

"Right," he agreed. "And she won't like waiting." He had a momentary fear that Pot was going to speak about June, spoke quickly to shut off the other's word. "You've kept up my place pretty well, Pot," he declared.

"Figured to," Pot assented. And he added, "But it won't do any good to cut the hay in that meadow any more. Full of alder sprouts and briars and all, this year."

They emerged from the wood into the open road before Pot's domicile and turned into the wheel tracks toward the farmyard. The sun was just setting. Where they passed, the rise of ground was sufficiently great so that they could see the westward hills above the tops of the trees along the stream; and the hills now were cloaked with purple, and the sky was bright, and against this glowing vault of the sky three black crows

winged with slow strokes, low over the hills, westward tending. Through the stillness, back and forth, the thrushes flung their song in a sweet antiphony; the call with its little swinging lilt as though the bird were balanced on a swaying bough. The cows were in the head of the lane by the barn and the murmur of their ruminations came to Overlook's ears. A sedate setter dog, with liver and black spots on his flanks and a black cloud about his right eye, rose from the kitchen porch and descended the steps and walked to meet them, questing with his nose at Overlook's hand. Overlook touched the beast's ear, with a friendly word, and the dog, satisfied, stood where he was. When they went on toward the house the creature swung his head and looked across the valley toward the west, still as stone, graven there.

Overlook said approvingly, "Nice-looking dog, Pot."

"He's ten years old," Pot replied.

"Any good?"

"I don't git any time for gunning," the other explained.

Then they were on the porch, and Pot opened the door and went in, Overlook following him. The kitchen table was set with three places, heavy blue plates and cutlery upon a red cloth.

June was not there; but when she heard them she came to a door at one side and said to Overlook, "You'll have to take what we got." Her tone was friendly, not so ungracious as her words.

"I'm sorry to bother you," he explained.

"I'm getting Junie to bed," she told them. "I won't be but a minute. You set up." She withdrew again.

Pot, it appeared, was already washed; when he took off his hat Overlook saw that the other's hair had been wet and combed.

"May I wash my hands?" he suggested; and Pot showed him the basin in the sink, the pail half full of water at one side, the dipper hanging from its nail. Before he was done June brought him a clean towel.

"This one's all right for me," he protested, nodding toward the used towel on its roller behind the door. But without argument she re-

moved it from the roller and took it away, and he was forced to use the one she had brought for the purpose. He did so, smiling to himself. She set upon the table a steaming dish, bade Pot fetch fresh water from the pump, told Overlook to sit down in the chair facing the westward windows. He obeyed her, and he smiled a little at his own thoughts—at a picture that came, as though from immeasurable distance, to remain for a moment before his eye.

He saw a small, beautiful room. There was a log burning on the hearth below the carved stone mantel; and the little flames, dancing, were reflected in the sheen of the walnut-paneled walls. In the midst of the room a round table was set with exquisite linen, heavy and fine; four candles in tall silver sticks, dimly illumining the room, revealed the texture and the life in a painting hung above the mantel. The table was rich with silver and fine porcelain and choice glass.

The table was set for one, and Overlook saw himself in the heavy, high-backed chair. At his elbow, Harkness, his perfect butler, bent in re-

spectful service, removing one plate, replacing it with another upon which was set a little covered dish in a silver holder. The room was very still; it was full of a careful leisure. Harkness did not seem to move about his business; he simply appeared and disappeared. While Overlook was busy with spoon or with knife and fork, the man withdrew into the background, lost himself in the shadows there, was forgotten. But when Overlook laid down his fork Harkness was at his elbow. Dishes came and went, and at length coffee in a tiny cup set in a silver web, and a cigarette, with a spirit lamp upon the tray; and a tiny glass, no larger than a thimble, in which something like amber glowed.

He sought to remember the names of the dishes upon which he dined; his chef was an artist, but his works were sometimes as obscure as they were delightful. The soup was clear; there was a morsel of some white-fleshed fish, vaguely flavored with the delicate aroma of fine wine; there was a meat so perfectly tender that it had no texture that was perceptible, and mushrooms, and potatoes like snow, and peas; four

stalks of endive; a bit of pastry; a crumbling triangle of white cheese pitted with blue mold.

"Let me help you to some beans," said Pot, and Overlook roused himself and extended his plate. "Like pork?" Pot inquired.

"Yes, indeed," Overlook assured him.

June came to his elbow. "You want tea?" she asked. "Or I can make coffee, if you'd rather."

"Tea, please," he assured her; and she decanted into his cup a stream of black and scalding liquid. Pot had filled his plate with beans swimming in their own richness; and June came back to sit down at his left, at the end of the table.

"Pass your plate," Pot directed, and she did so. After the first heaping spoonful—"Plenty," she said; received her plate back again at Overlook's hands, and met his eyes. He smiled.

"Have some of the pickle," she suggested, and passed it to him. Then the hot soda biscuits. Then the butter. "There's pie," she explained.

"What kind?" Overlook asked, and she said, "Blueberry." His enthusiasm won from her a faint smile.

He found himself astonishingly hungry, the beans astonishingly good. When he passed his plate a second time he said, "I'd forgotten beans could be like this."

Pot also served himself again, and Overlook remarked that the other sprinkled sugar on his beans, and then added vinegar. And he said in amusement, "Hullo! Sugar and vinegar! That's a new one to me."

"Best way to fix beans, I always say," Pot declared.

"I'll try it," Overlook decided; and June warned him: "You better try a little in a dish first."

"I'll risk it," he said, and laughed. There was something about the resulting flavor so frank and unashamed that he laughed again, amused at himself. But he cleaned his plate, and then June brought the pie and they pushed their plates aside.

They had talked little while they ate; but when they were done and June was moving to and fro about the task of clearing away the dishes and preparing to wash them, the two filled their pipes

and fell to conversation, curiously stilted and restrained, coming to confidence by slow degrees. Overlook perceived in Pot an aching curiosity; so he spoke about himself, told them in some small measure what his life had been, and his activities. Pot found them a little difficult to understand.

"Borrowing money?" he asked, in faint bewilderment.

Overlook laughed. "Financing, it's called," he explained. "You look around till you see a chance to make money in some business, some enterprise; then you find the money, get men together to go into it." He offered an example. "Say you decided a sawmill would do well down in the valley here, and you got four or five men to put up the money to buy a mill and hire someone to run it."

"What would I get out of it?" Pot asked cautiously, and Overlook expounded the matter to him. The farmer listened respectfully enough; but he said at the end in a tone lacking all conviction, "Well, if you say it's so." He added, "Guess you've done pretty well at it."

"Pretty well," Overlook confessed.

"Car like that costs something," Pot hazarded. June was moving to and fro, giving them no apparent heed. But Overlook watched her uneasily.

"Why, yes."

"Guess you probably have someone to keep it shined up."

"Yes; yes, I have a chauffeur."

Pot digested this. "Live in New York, do you? Got a family, have you?"

Overlook laughed. "No; no, I never married. I live in an apartment." It amused him to add, "I have a man to look out for my clothes—sew the buttons on, and so on." June's complete inattention piqued him; he added defiantly, yet with a chuckle at himself, "And a Frenchman to do my cooking and a man to wait on my table."

"Takes four of 'em to take care of you, don't it?" Pot suggested, and Overlook had a curious sense of chagrin. He caught June in a faint smile; it seemed to him there was a twinkle even in Pot's dull eye; and he was discomfited, and rose, looking at his watch.

"I'll go along," he decided.

"You come over to breakfast," June invited; but he shook his head.

"If you'll let me have some eggs and milk and butter and bread, I'll get my own. I can cook if I have to," he added, curiously anxious to reinstate himself. "And oil for the lamps. There's none over there. I'll go to the Corner in the morning."

"Figure to stay a day or two, do you?" Pot inquired.

"Till I can get the car fixed," Overlook explained.

June had ready, in a little while, the victuals he required, packed in a ten-quart pail; she gave him an old whisky bottle full of oil.

"Thank you," he said, and met her eye and smiled at her again. "Good night."

"Good night," she returned. She and Pot had come out on the porch, and she had a lamp in her hand, its light across her countenance, her body all in shadow. There was serene beauty in her brow; a sweet composure in her eye; strength in the curve of her lip. He stood a moment, held there, faintly shaken.

"Want I should let you have a lantern?" Pot asked, and Overlook roused himself.

"No, no," he said. "No, there's light enough. Good night."

So he turned almost hurriedly away, stumbling down the steps, fumbling with his feet for the wheel ruts in the turf. After a moment they two went back into the kitchen; the night closed around him. He looked up and found companions in the stars.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE was light enough, as he had said; he could see the black masses of the trees on the slope of the ridge ahead of him; could see the bold flanks of the ridge rising steeply at his right hand; and below him, to the left, there was a pool of shadow above the alders where the still brook lay. Some suggestion of silver in the sky above the ridge told him there would be a moon; he found himself guessing what the weather would be next day, and he chuckled at this.

“Long time since I’ve thought much about the weather,” he reminded himself. Remembered, with a little pride in his own memory, that the brightness of the sunset was an ancient sign of a fair morrow.

He could see, vaguely, all about him; but he could not see with any distinctness the ground beneath his feet; and his feet fumbled for the

wheel ruts to guide him, his shoes brushing against the grassy turf on either side. He went in no haste, full of peace; the hour was early, he was not sleepy, had never been more alert to all the world about him. The wheel ruts dipped down to the road, and by the treacherous feeling of the clay beneath his feet he knew the dew was falling heavily. He touched an alder beside the road and got a little shower of drops for his pains; and when he stopped on the bridge and leaned his elbows on the rail there, the moisture penetrated almost instantly to his arms. He stood looking down at the black water, in whose still mirror stars appeared; and when he shifted his position something slapped the water with an explosive sound and he was startled, and then remembered. There had always been many muskrats along the Sheepscot; he had set traps for them as a boy, learned to peel their skins and stretch and dry them.

"I'd like to trap a muskrat again," he thought. "They're evidently here."

A call came to him, low and curiously hurried, the muffled and reverberant hoot of an owl;

it might have been half a mile away, so still was the night; behind him, up the valley. He swung his head to look that way, unconsciously; and a shadow moved against the starred vault of the sky with a soundless speed.

He chuckled. "Right behind me," he told himself. "Probably watching me all the time."

After a little he went on toward the house, his feet now laboring a little in the soft sand of the road, so that he left the beaten way and stepped over the crumbling stone wall into the field grown with shoots and saplings, where better footing favored him. His progress here was more disturbing to the peaceful quiet of the night; twigs brushed against his clothing, briers crackled under his feet, and now and then he stumbled over an inequality of the ground where a boulder broke the sod or a clump of ground where pine grew. He came to the house, dark as he had left it; and he went in almost reluctantly, pausing for a moment on the kitchen porch to look down the valley in the darkness there, and to listen for far sounds or for near ones. Somewhere a truck was laboring up a grade

with grinding gears; their whining song came to him with something reminiscent in it. "Traffic," he told himself whimsically, and listened for a while. And then he thought, "Barring Pot Riddle's place, I don't suppose there's a man within a mile."

Overlook was not one given to fearful imaginings. Neither the night nor the stillness could disturb him now; he found them soothing and sweet, and there was no sense of strangeness in this hour. He had passed this way before. The road and the bridge, the silent farmhouse—all were anciently familiar; they were so familiar that he lost for a while every sense of the present, found his memories curiously confusing, could never be sure whether he were himself or the boy he used to be. He went into the kitchen as sure-footedly as though it were day; and he turned into the dining room, where the lamps were, and found one and brought it out to the kitchen table and filled it there by the sense of touch, and so made a light for himself. He had left open the outer door; and almost at once insects began to come in, attracted by the light, but turning their

attention instantly to him. So he closed the door and wished there were screens for the windows, and then he remembered that there had been adjustable screens somewhere and went searching for them. He found them in the second-floor attic, piled upon a table there and wrapped in paper; and when he unwrapped them it was to discover that they had been anointed with oil so that they, too, were free from rust and as useful as they had ever been, and he was struck again by the fact that someone had cared for this old house tenderly.

"June," he told himself. "Never Pot, but June for sure." And he found new pleasure in the certainty, and new disturbance, too, and great bewilderment. For June had married Pot, after all. So, standing by the table in the attic there, he fell once more into a maze of memories.

He remembered June so vividly; a little girl with thick braids and stubby legs and a doll upon her arm, coming for the first time to school. A little girl with thick braids and stubby legs and a doll upon her arm, running desperately to

escape from boisterous and jeering boys. A little girl—always a little girl. The absurdity of this now came home to him. June must have grown up; must have been, by the time he went away over the ridge, sixteen or seventeen. Even at the time of the kiss, that kiss which the others took and he forbore, she must have been nine or ten. And he struggled to picture her; to remember how she had looked; to recall what manner of girl she had been.

Little by little he got brief glimpses. He had a flash of June climbing the fence around her home; climbing the fence at the corner of the yard. And he remembered how long her leg was, straddling and reaching down for a lower footing. From this one long leg he managed to reconstruct a girl who was also rather long; certainly not chubby. Even her pigtail—one now, instead of two—was long, and dangled. He was like a scientist who from a single small fragment of bone undertakes to reconstruct a monster of old time, except that Overlook had many more data than the scientist has; he had June's leg, in a black cotton stocking, with a red garter just

above the knee and a white garment visible—as she climbed the fence—above that too. And he had her eyes; he remembered her baby eyes, and he had seen her eyes today. They were in some fashion, still the same; had always been the same, he knew. So he managed to satisfy himself that he remembered exactly how she looked when she climbed the fence that day.

And then the whole scene came back to him. He and Pot had been passing on their way to school, and she had come running to join them, scrambling over the fence to walk with them to the Corner, calling to him, “Wait, Walter! Wait for me!” And Overlook remembered that he had, faintly, halted, till Pot jeered at him, mimicking her shrill tones: “Wait for me, Walter dearie! Wait for me!”

So he had flung away, red to the ears, cuffing at Pot, shouting back at June contemptuously, bidding her keep her distance there, trudging angrily on to school.

He sought to remember some picture of June as she grew older, but in this he had small satisfaction. He remembered her one day standing

up beside her desk to recite; she was by that time very tall, and her hair clouded her face a little, and her eyes were still. And he had another glimpse of her sweeping off the front stoop of the Haradeen house as he and his father went by; and another, and another. But about all these later memories there was mystery; she seemed remote and aloof, removed from him and from the world in which he took his way.

Only, suddenly and very vividly, he remembered the day he went away from home. Pot Riddle drove him up over the ridge to catch the stage at Liberty; and when they passed the Haradeen house June came to the door to look out at them. Across the distance between the house and the road their eyes had met; and he remembered even now that for some reason this glimpse of her had made him homesick, made him for a moment doubt the wisdom of the adventure he began. Her glance was still and long, her eyes unveiled. Even had he understood, it could scarce have moved him in that hour; but he had lacked the wit to understand. Only, he remembered, Pot had said harshly, "Let go them reins!"

So he perceived that, seeing her, he had sought to check the horse and stop him there; and he obeyed Pot in something like a panic, and wrenched around, and they drove on. He had a moment's poignant regret now that he had not even called good-by. And he remembered how Pot had jeered at him.

It was always, it appeared, Pot who was the villain in these scenes. Yet June had married Pot, after all.

He roused, came back to the task under his hand, took three or four of the screens downstairs and opened windows, swinging back the shutters, inserting a screen beneath each sash so that the house would be airy and cool. But he was not yet ready for sleep; so he took off his shoes and his coat and put on slippers and dressing gown and wandered through the dining room into the parlor. That room, in the old days, had been seldom used; it was a sanctum, a repository for those things which were wrapped in a napkin and put away where they would neither decay nor molder nor corrode. The room had been opened, he remembered, for his father's funeral.

Standing in the doorway, with his lamp held high, it seemed to him he could see the coffin resting on the undertaker's folding supports, like carpenters' horses; and there had been half a dozen people standing in the room, and someone sobbing perfunctorywise, and someone had played the organ.

The organ was here, shrouded from the dust. He had an abrupt memory of his father sitting on the stool, treading rhythmically, his fingers busy with stops and keys. After his mother died—perhaps even before, though Walter could not remember—his father had liked to play the organ now and then. Walter tried to recall the tunes he had played—could name but one—Climbing Up the Golden Stairs. He remembered it as a beautiful, almost a gay melody full of the accompaniment of ringing bells; there must be some sort of chime attached to the organ, he decided. His father, sitting there on the stool, feet and hands busy, bald head shining mildly through the straying wisps of hair, and the air full of the delicate symphony of bells—Climbing Up the Golden Stairs.

He removed the protecting sheet and tried to evoke from the organ some sound that would find a harmony in his memories; but there was between him and the instrument no sympathetic coördination. He abandoned the attempt and covered the organ again. He had set the lamp on the table, beside the stuffed figure of a small barn owl which stood there; beside the ornamental china lamp with hand-painted flowers on its white circumference. His mother, he seemed to remember, had painted those flowers. He touched them lightly with his fingers; thick roughnesses upon the smooth surface of the china. And his eyes swung around the room. A picture, framed, hung between the windows. It was covered with a cloth, but he had no need to remove this cloth to remember that it represented a bunch of grapes and two apples beside a woven basket. There was a high old desk against the wall opposite the organ, and two antlers lay atop it. His father had picked them up in the swamp where the deer used to yard. In one corner hung the hoof and a few inches of the leg of a caribou, the hoof polished till it shone. A phrase leaped

into his thoughts. "The last caribou ever shot in the state of Maine," his father had used to boast. It had been killed somewhere in the north woods, and Overlook never knew how the trophy came into his father's possession.

Beside the desk there were two shelves hung on the wall, and books upon them; and he removed the cloth that covered these shelves to look along the titles. A bulky government report on the North Atlantic fisheries. A seed catalogue. *Two Years Before the Mast*, *A History of the Buccaneers of America*, and the first volume of *Merchants of Old New York*. A book on bee culture. A volume of Shakspeare, thick and worn, printed in atrocious type. A mail-order catalogue and a pile of old farm papers. Thus the upper shelf; on that below there was a lacquered tin box with a broken lock, and a great Bible.

This Bible fixed his eye. It was bound in leather, its covers half an inch thick, the leather deeply graved; and he took it down with a slow hand, his memory leaping now. He could remember his grandfather poring over this Book; could see the old man, his bent shoulders covered with

that shawl which in Walter's thoughts he always wore, leafing through the pages with trembling fingers, or writing slow words with an uncertain pen, or reading aloud, heavily. And Overlook carried the Book to the table and opened it there upon the marble slab; and upon the first blank page within the inner cover he saw a dozen lines of yellowed writing in an uncertain hand. He puzzled them through:

"I bought this Bible August 12, 1874, from a man that came in a team.

"My grandfather, William Overlook, first owner of this farm, married Serena Hepperton before 1800. They had Eleven children. My father Walter Overlook the oldest son. Seven of children died before my grandfather died. My father Married twice but no children the first marriage his wife Died. But the second he married Mary Frame and they had seven children. Two still alive, Mary and Walter Overlook the second child the oldest son."

Overlook read these lines slowly, smiling once or twice as he read, a curious gentleness in his

eyes. And when he was done he turned the page. There had been in this old Bible, he remembered, a record of the family; but at first he could not find it. He looked through the many preliminary pages; then cast forward to the end of the Old Testament and discovered there the Apocrypha and gave it a momentary examination before seeking further. So, at the end of the Apocrypha and before the New Testament began, he came upon that which he sought. Four pages, their borders scrolled with gilt, each decorated at the top with an engraving; blank lines below, where faded writing strayed. He read the line arched across the top of the first page:

THOSE WHOM GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER
LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER

And then, below:

CERTIFICATE

THIS CERTIFIES THAT
THE RITE OF
HOLY MATRIMONY
WAS CELEBRATED

between Walter Overlook, of Liberty, Maine,
and Lavinia Wentworth, of Palermo, Maine,
on September 9, 1856,
by Reverend Randall Tower.

WITNESS: { My father.
 { Lavinia's father and mother.

His grandfather must have filled out this certificate when he acquired the Bible, eighteen years after his marriage; for the minister's name was in the same hand as the other insertions, and there were no signatures of the witnesses.

Atop the next page stood the word "BIRTHS"; and below, a scroll of names:

"William Overlook, October 7, 1857."

"Walter Overlook, December 14, 1858."

This was his father, he remembered; and he felt a pulse quicken in his throat:

"Millie Overlook, March 3, 1860."

"Chester Overlook, May 2, 1861."

"Minnie Overlook, July 7, 1864."

These five names had been set down, he

guessed, when the Bible came to the farm in 1874—brothers and sisters. Immediately below, and in a chirography into which there began to creep the tremor of age, there were other names:

“By Walter Overlook and Sarah May Overlook——”

His own father and mother. He smiled faintly at the introductory word, and then felt an even keener quickening of his heart:

“Walter Overlook, August 2, 1891.”

Himself! Another Walter Overlook, fourth or fifth of the name perhaps; an old name, brought thus devotedly out of the past for his use and his tending.

“Sarah Overlook, June 5, 1895.”

His sister. His eyes lifted; he stared across the lamplit room. She died, he remembered, when she was a baby; he must have been very young, no more than five or six years old. Yet it seemed to him that he remembered, visually and definitely, the morning of the day she died. She

died in the night; and in the morning he was in the room, with his father and mother, and her small body lay upon the great bed. He had no memory of tears or outward grief; but he remembered, somehow, hearing the phrase, "Her soul has flown away."

And abruptly, even in this moment, he saw that soul; saw it quite definitely as something small, in a little frame, with wings on either side. He had never had another sister or a brother; and he stood swimming in a sweet regret, yet amused, too, at his own youthful visualization of the thing called a soul—wondered whence that conception came.

On the opposite page, headed "MARRIAGES," there were only two entries. The first related the marriage of his father and mother:

"Walter Overlook of Liberty and Sarah May of Palermo, May 3, 1888."

Sarah May. She had lived down the road a mile or two, in that house where he stopped for direction this afternoon. A small woman with thin hair and red cheeks, who sometimes coughed

a good deal, and who would defend him when she could against his father's wrath; a woman always cheerful in a way that tore your heart.

"Millie Overlook married Howard Berry of Thomaston, June 11, 1892."

This was his aunt, his father's sister; she who had for a time after his mother died kept the house for them. Herself dead now, he knew; dead in these years since he left home. He tried to remember the date, to set it down here; made a mental note to search it out and put it in the record. She had no children; her husband had lived only a little while, left her alone in the world. A seafaring man. Overlook remembered her as an austere woman of whom he had always been resentfully afraid. It occurred to him now that she might have worn austerity to support her rigid self-control, to protect herself against the curious sympathy of the world.

He turned the page and came to the last of the four, and instantly his eye fixed upon a device at the top. An hourglass, winged! And he laughed in a startled way, without mirth, staring

at the engraving, for it was the very presentment of his sister's soul as he had always imagined it in his memories. The discovery evoked in his thoughts another picture—a picture of himself, a little boy of five or six or so, watching while his grandfather set here the record of his sister's death. A little boy on tiptoe beside an old man shrouded in a shawl.

"I must have seen it then," he told himself. "And I'd heard her soul had flown away—and it had wings to fly."

He studied the engraving for a moment; then his eyes touched the word "DEATHS" below, and so turned to the entries on the page. Names, and dates curiously summary and overpowering in their finality, and a word or two of explanation after some of them:

"William Overlook, January 2, 1859, with cough."

William. He looked back. That would be his father's elder brother. He made a momentary calculation. Two years old.

"Minnie Overlook, July 8, 1864. She had blue eys."

Minnie. Born on the seventh of July. Lived but a single day. "She had blue eys." He found a curious poignancy in that misspelled word; it was the first he had remarked in all the record there. "She had blue eys," and she lived a single day.

"Lavinia Overlook, July 11, 1864."

No comment there. His grandmother, three days after this baby who "had blue eys" and scarce opened them upon the world before they closed, to reveal their blue no more.

"Chester Overlook, July 3, 1867. Of stomach."

Six years old then. "Of stomach." He thought ruefully that a baby must have stout and enduring inner workings to endure farm fare and thrive thereon.

"Mary Overlook, January 14, 1879, aged 55."

This entry at first puzzled him; he located this Mary at last in that note on the blank page in

the front of the Bible. His grandfather's sister. The date made him realize that this was the first event after the acquisition of the Bible itself; that these other deaths had been set down from memory. An old man with a shawl across his shoulders, and a quavering pen. Overlook shook his head.

"But he probably didn't wear a shawl in 1879," he reminded himself. "And his handwriting was firm enough then."

"Sarah Overlook, August 3, 1895."

His sister; her soul like a winged hour-glass, flying away into the immensities. "August 3." Two months old.

"Pretty tough on children, the farm was," he thought, "in those days."

"Sarah May Overlook, December 2, 1900."

His mother. He was nine years old; yet clearly enough he remembered her, could see her now. His eyes lifted from the page, looking straight ahead of him, and it was some minutes before they returned to the book again.

The next entry, he saw at once, was in a different hand from those that had gone before—in his father's hand. And when he read the entry he understood:

"Walter Overlook, born June 16, 1826, died February 13, 1901."

He had a curious difficulty in imagining his father setting this entry here; he remembered his father as a bluff, bold man, full-blooded and matter-of-fact and hard. This was out of character; yet the line stood unmistakable. The last line in the record! And he considered this, and he who read perceived that the scroll was incomplete. He took the lamp and went gravely to his bedroom and returned with his fountain pen; and in the still parlor, under the glowing lamp, he wrote his father's death:

"Walter Overlook, born December 14, 1858; died June 22, 1911."

He stood a moment more, eyes thoughtful, considering; and then he added:

"This entry made by Walter Overlook, the fourth, born August 2, 1891. I know no other descendant of the original Walter Overlook who is still alive. I am the last of the line."

He had set this down with a curious decision, with something like a sense of its dramatic value; but when he put the pen aside and stood erect once more he was momentarily uncomfortable, as though he felt all about him there in the room ancient presences who looked on him with disapproving eyes.

"And likely to be the last," he said aloud, almost defiantly. "Likely to be the last of the line."

His sense that someone watched him was so strong that he glanced to right and left; but he was alone. Only the ancient record in the Bible looked up at him from the table there. He turned the page to hide it from his view, to hide himself from its accusing scrutiny.

"I'm not likely to marry," he said again, idly turning the leaves. And his thoughts drifted; he remembered, curiously, June's eyes. Eyes clear

and steady and wearing none of the marks of a corroding life.

"Pot's wife," he thought. "Potiphar's wife." And he thought of that other Potiphar's wife and her vague disrepute, and became curious about it and went searching in the Book before him. At first he was at a loss; but the name Joseph came into his mind and he turned backward toward the beginning. Saw here and there "Moses" and "Moses," and doubted his own memory, and cast about, till at last a line sprang distinct before his eyes:

"And Joseph died, and all his brethren."

He felt himself on surer ground and searched more diligently, and so found at last the passage. He was curious to know the name of this wife of another Potiphar, and he discovered that she was nameless.

"A certain justice in that," he thought; and found his attention caught by the drama of the tale that there was told; and he drew a chair and sat down by the table and read on, skipping here and there, retracing his steps, casting ahead.

After a time he began to perceive, looming behind the flowing and sonorous words, a great man; a liberator, a deliverer. The tremendous story of a man who found a savage tribe enslaved by cruel masters, who organized them in revolt, and led them to precarious freedom; who thereafter with a fine wisdom and sagacity, playing upon their weaknesses and strengthening their strength, instilled in them an undying racial consciousness, invulnerable and eternal, fit to withstand the utmost buffets of the world.

He read for hours—and laid the Book aside at last with one line singing in his ears: “A driven leaf shall chase them.” He left the Book and moved slowly to the room where he would sleep, his thoughts searching again the panorama of great events which he had viewed.

He had not been a man given to thoughts of the past; his glance had cast forward ever, considering the morrow, the immediate future and what he might gain therein. But he found himself thinking tonight of the past; his own roots, spread before his eyes in that ancient family

record he had read, and the remoter past set down in the Book itself.

A man who looks into the far past is apt to begin to consider the far future, too, to ask himself what his own part therein shall be.

When he was abed at last, the light extinguished, he could hear the night outside his windows. Up in the orchard there was a stir among the trees; he heard branches shake, and apples fall.

"Deer feeding there," he thought drowsily, and smiled as he listened to their voracious industry. And once something trotted past the house, light footfalls in the dew. A fox or a cat or some small creature moving unafraid. He leaned on his elbow to look out where the moonlight now lay like hoar-frost on the grass; and after a little he lay down again and slept as he had slept in this same bed when he was a boy, dreamless and serene.

CHAPTER IX

HE had been late in going to bed; and he was a man who was accustomed, in his own place, to sleep late when the occasion served. But Overlook woke that morning at the first gray of dawn against his windows; and he lay a moment, still half sleeping, half expecting his father's call to arise and attack the chores. When fuller wakefulness came to him he remembered where he was and knew that his father would not call; but he was in no mood to sleep again. So, as he had done when he was a boy here, he woke before day and rose before sunrise. The matter of a bath confronted him; in dressing gown and slippers, he went to the shed and tried to decide whether the tub hanging on the studding there would hold water for a sufficient length of time to serve his purposes; discarded the idea, and instead put on his shoes and went along the road to the stream and bathed there in the pool

below the bridge, in the water, icy and clear.

It left him tingling, and he raced back to the house; and the rising sun, just lifting above the ridge, caught him as he ran. A little later, dressed, he built a fire in the stove. At first it smoked; but after a little the flue, warmed, began to draw; and he heated water and shaved while his coffee boiled, and cooked his breakfast and ate it gustily; and afterward he washed the dishes he had used in scalding water, using the soap from his toilet case, wiping them with a cloth he found in one of the pantry drawers.

He took keen pleasure in this task, discovered a satisfaction in his own efficiency. "Not so useless as I look," he told himself with a chuckle, and spread the dishcloth on the grass outside the door to dry. And when he looked up he saw June coming toward him there, coming along the sandy road.

She came with the sun at her back, tall and strong and fine; and her head was bare to the sun's caress, and the little girl held her hand and trudged bravely at her side, so that her coming was slow. Overlook stood waiting, looking at her,

curiously discomposed. She left the road and lifted the child in her arms so that the dew might not wet its shoes; and he had a momentary thought that the sunlight, in her hair, made it like an aureole. Then she was near him, looking at him, and he took refuge in the commonplace.

"Good morning, June," he said.

She nodded, glancing at the cloth on the grass. "I thought I'd come over and cook your breakfast," she explained. "I never looked for you to be up."

He laughed. "I've been about for hours."

She spoke in a murmur to the little girl, then to him again. "I've heard tell that a man that's used to noise at night can't sleep where it's still."

"Noise!" he smiled. "Why, the stillness here is a lot noisier than the noise in the city! There was something in the orchard last night, and something went past my window once or twice. And the day came up shouting, over the ridge."

Her eyes met his; and he felt, uncomfortably, that she must think him a fool to talk so; to speak of a day that was just like every other day in

such exuberant terms. So her words surprised him.

"More like it was laughing, like a little girl," she suggested.

He was led a step toward her, surprised into stammering. "A great morning, isn't it?" he agreed.

"You've had your breakfast, I guess."

"And washed the dishes, too," he assured her. "I've kept house for myself before, you know. Father and I were bachelors here for a good many years. It's—amusing to get back to it now." He watched her, puzzled, wondering.

"You have a good night?" she asked.

He smiled. "Yes," he said; "yes. But not as you think. I slept very little." He pointed toward the porch, where the sun lay pleasantly. "Sit down," he urged. "You're mighty good to come."

She sat down quietly where he suggested, holding the baby in her arms. It hid its face from him, and she said, "Don't pay any heed to her. You have to let children come to you. It's knowing the way with them."

He nodded. "I came home from your house," he explained, "and looked around here a while. And I found my grandfather's old family Bible, with the names of all his children in it, and my father and mother, and my sister's name, and my own. And then I got to reading it." He laughed. "I don't believe I've read a line in the Bible since I went to New York." She did not speak for a moment, and he told himself she was thinking that in New York no one read the Bible. "Any city means a sink of corruption to her," he thought amusedly.

But when she did speak, it was to say, "I guess you could have read it there if you'd been a mind. I guess folks do, there, much as anywhere else."

He looked at her, his faint surprise in his eyes, and she met his glance with a quiet and assured serenity. After a moment he spoke again.

"I read about Moses," he explained. "Read the whole story through. You know, that's a wonderful tale—for a man to take a tribe of slaves and drill something into them that has never died."

"Like a man with his children," she said gently; and he was struck by her tone and by her words, and looked at her for a moment in silence, wondering.

"It was pride, in him," he suggested at last—"high, racial pride. Remember when he killed an Egyptian who was getting the better of one of the Hebrews? Pride, and a fierce loyalty. He was a pretty humble man himself, but he was mighty proud of them."

"It was knowing about the old men that had been before him," she commented surely. "And knowing what he wanted for the ones that would come after. He could look a long ways."

"He pounded something into them," he agreed. "It's still there; they've never got rid of it. It's him, in them."

The little girl, attracted by the earnestness in his voice, looked at him with wide eyes; and he saw this look and smiled in his friendliest way. But at his smile she hid her face again, and June gathered her close and rose. She stood a moment longer, looking down at Overlook; and he said quickly, "Don't go—unless you must."

"Pot's getting your car out of the road," she explained, "case somebody comes along."

He stood up. "Of course; I'll go help him. Fine! I'll walk along with you."

She made no protest, and they set out toward the bridge; and in the sandy road she let the child walk on her other side, herself between it and Overlook. He spoke once or twice, but found her silent; and he looked at her now and then, and once met her eyes. And when they came to the bridge he said, "You know, it's a wonderful experience, coming back here so. I'm going to come again."

"You say so now," she said unemotionally. "But a man that goes away don't come back here."

"Have you ever been away?" he asked, and she shook her head. "Don't you want to go?"

"I live here," she explained; and he saw in her eyes something like a smile, like a smiling appeal for understanding from him, as though she knew she had failed to express that which was her thought.

"It's pretty quiet—lonely," he suggested doubtfully.

"I can hear the brook running," she told him. "It's always open, some places, even in winter. I guess it's always been the same." She seemed, he saw, to cling to the enduring things.

They were come to the wheel tracks that led into the farmyard, and she turned aside. "Pot's up the road," she explained; and he felt himself dismissed and stood watching her move away toward the house, his eyes thoughtful, puzzling over her. There were, he felt, strange depths in her; a quiet, sure philosophy.

"Yet she—she's not a fool," he thought doubtfully. "And she can't be contented here—with Pot."

He had a moment's bitterness toward Pot; but it passed, and he went on up the road and found the man somewhat at a loss, making little progress. The horse, with traces and chain attached, stood patiently. Overlook greeted Pot, entered with him into the problem that confronted them; and at length they hitched the horse to the rear end and dragged the car down

the steep pitch, Overlook at the wheel, controlling it with the brakes, steering awkwardly. At the first opportunity they swung it across the road and maneuvered it about till it was headed down the hill again; and then Pot towed it ingloriously to the bridge and through the sand to Overlook's farm. They opened the barn there and made a place for the car on the barn floor and hauled it in. Here it would be sheltered till repairs could be arranged.

Pot said there might be someone in East Harbor who could fix the car. "Or it ain't much further to Augusta," he conceded. But he confessed that he had no telephone, and Overlook decided to walk up the ridge road to the Corner and telephone from there.

"I'll want to get some things anyway," he explained. "No need of borrowing from you."

"I can carry you up if you want," Pot suggested doubtfully; but Overlook shook his head, laughing a little.

"I've walked it before," he reminded the farmer. "We've walked it more than once, Pot, you and I."

Pot grinned faintly. "All right, if you're a mind to," he agreed, and clucked to his horse, turned the creature toward the road.

"Much obliged for your time, Pot," Overlook called after him. He thought of payment, had the wit to hold back the word. The other accepted his thanks with a nod and disappeared toward the bridge, walking beside his shambling horse, the chain dragging in the sand behind. Overlook, watching his stooped and toil-racked figure, thought again, "Yet she married him, after all." His thoughts were full of her.

There was nothing to prevent his starting at once for the Corner; but he made a further examination of the car so that he might be prepared to specify its needs. So at last he set out. The morning sang about him; the chubs in the brook were feeding on the surface when he crossed the bridge, and he saw a goodly trout lying under the roots of the old gray birch. When he passed Pot's farm Pot was in the yard at some chore, and the little girl played about the place, chaperoned by the grave old dog. Then trees hid the house from his sight, and he began to climb.

The way was steep and steeper; but Overlook, as a matter of efficient living, had kept himself in easy condition and the climb did not distress him. He walked swiftly, falling unconsciously into the quick, clipped step which a rocky road requires of the pedestrian, striding from boulder to boulder, moving gingerly upon the slippery clay between. The road was in shade, cloaked by trees, somewhat under the brow of the ridge for a while; but he came to the top at last and emerged between open meadows, with the sun in his face, and saw the Haradeen house on the left hand of the road ahead.

He had a sudden curiosity to know whether Jim Haradeen still lived here; but when he came to the place he saw that it was shuttered, the grass grown tall in the yard, and he went on a little sadly. June's father must be dead then; not even May left here. He wondered whom May had married, where she had gone to live. Some stout farmer in the village beyond the Corner perhaps. The road slanted to the south along the shoulder of the high ground, and now began to descend; and he saw the church, the store, the

two or three houses which constituted the Corner, and the very school where he had come twenty years and more ago. Closed now, the yard grown with grass between its trodden spaces. This was vacation time.

He saw a woman at a kitchen window watching him, and smiled. "I'll bet she's buzzing with curiosity," he told himself. "Chances are they don't often see a stranger here." He tried to remember who had lived in this house, and could not; but the next beyond had been Hepperton's, just this side the store. And the house was, he saw, well cared for and in order, the paint fresh, the shed half full of wood. On impulse, he turned aside and went into the yard and around to the kitchen door.

The woman who opened to him had about her a certain vague familiarity which he could not define. He asked pleasantly, "Isn't this the Hepperton place?"

She wiped her hands on her apron. "Yes, it is," she said in a noncommittal tone.

"Does Will Hepperton live here, I wonder?"

"Yes, he does," she replied.

He smiled gently. "My name's Overlook," he explained—"Walter Overlook. I was born down over the ridge, and I used to know Will pretty well. Is he around now?"

She looked at him attentively but made no comment upon the disclosure of his identity. Nevertheless, it seemed to move her, for she said at last, "He's up in the back field, if you want to go up there."

He looked doubtful. "I don't know just where it is."

"Go up through the pasture," she explained, "along the wall. You'll see him when you come to the top of the hill."

He smiled. "Thank you," he told her. "That's fine. I will." He had stood with bared head while he spoke to her; replaced his hat now as he turned away and started toward the cow lane beyond the barn. At the corner of the barn he looked back and saw her still standing there, watching him; and he smiled inwardly, yet with a swift sympathy too.

There was a plank fence along the lane; and when he climbed that, a black-and-white setter

on a chain under an apple tree barked at him. He spoke soothingly to the dog, pausing for a moment till its tail began to wag. Will's father, he remembered, had used to train bird dogs. Will, perhaps, had the same gift still. He followed the wall as the woman had directed and found it swung back up the hill down which he had come. And when he came to the top and climbed out of the pasture he saw a man cutting brush in a wide swath through the little alder run below, to let the sunshine in and let the grass grow for pasturage. The man was a dozen rods away and Overlook went toward him slowly, unseen till he was near the other. Then he who worked heard or felt Overlook's presence, and paused and raised his head; and Overlook knew him, and said quickly, "Will Hepperton!"

The other hesitated, then nodded slowly. "Yes."

"Know me, don't you?" Overlook demanded.

Hepperton considered for a space. "You have the look of Walter Overlook," he said cautiously.

Overlook laughed. "That's who it is, Will," he assured the other, and was astonished to dis-

cover a halting in his voice, an uncertainty in his tone. He strode forward, held out his hand; and Hepperton looked at his own hand uncertainly and wiped it on his overalls before extending it.

"Your wife told me you were up here," Overlook explained. He had been full of eagerness to see this old friend of his, but he was curiously uncertain now what to do or say.

Hepperton nodded. "When'd you get here?" he asked.

"Drove over from Augusta yesterday," Overlook told him. "I'm on my way fishing; but I came over to have a look at the old place, see some of my old friends."

Hepperton looked doubtfully about him. "Been away quite a spell, ain't you?" he commented carefully.

"Fifteen years," Overlook confessed. "But things have changed mighty little, Will. A few farms abandoned, that's all."

"Yes, they're going; getting out of here."

"You've got the best farm in town," Overlook told him heartily.

"Just about get along," Hepperton agreed. "Taxes eat you up unless a man gets some road work to do."

Overlook laughed, as though at his own thoughts. "Will, you know the first person I saw that I knew was June Haradeen."

"Down at Pot's?" Will conjectured.

"Yes." And he challenged the other: "You remember the day you and Pot and I chased her, when she was a little kid, and kissed her?"

Hepperton considered this, shook his head. "Don't recollect," he confessed.

"I was thinking of that last night," Overlook explained. He was trying desperately to make conversation, to win this silent man into a more genial mood, break down the barrier between them; that which he said now he said with no other purpose than this, to raise up again a bond out of the past. "I was thinking of that last night," he declared, "and how mad she was."

"Was she?" Hepperton commented. "I'd clean forgot."

"But she married Pot after all," Overlook concluded, half to himself, his eyes clouding. And

because he was not looking at Hepperton he did not see the change in the other's bearing, the faint interest, the quickening eye, till Hepperton said slowly, "Why—no, she didn't."

Overlook swung back to him then, swift and keen: "What?"

"No, it was May that married Pot," Hepperton told him.

"June's down there!" Overlook urged.

"Well, May married him," Hepperton explained. "And right after, old Jim died and they sold the farm, so June she went down there so's to be near May when her baby come."

"But she's living with Pot now!" Overlook cried in impatient insistence. "She's living with Pot now!"

Hepperton nodded. "May died after her second baby come," he explained. "Last September it was, or October. And June's been a-taking care of the young ones."

Overlook stood very still, fighting for self-control, revising his world; and when he spoke again it was in the most casual of tones.

"Oh, I see," he agreed. "I didn't ask, of course; just took it for granted. . . . May died?"

So they drifted into reminiscence and Hepperton told the accumulated news of the town. The fact that he had been able to surprise Overlook in this matter of June seemed to inspire him; he talked on and on, enjoying the other's interested questions. And Overlook listened long, prompting the man, content that the other should forget the barrier between them. But he began at length to be impatient to be gone, and eventually he left Hepperton there in the alder run and struck back along the shoulder of the hill toward the road by which he had come.

He went in haste, as though there were need for it, as though time would not wait for him. And not till he came to the point where the road entered the wood and dipped down the ridge toward the river did he pause.

There, however, he slacked his pace and at last stood still; and he fought for a little against a curious desire to turn and run away, to hurry back to the Corner and telephone Jenks of the

mishap to the car and hire another machine to take him to Augusta. There was danger here—down this steep and rocky way among the cool green of the trees, with June waiting in the valley below. Much better for him if he did not go down the hill at all, if he telephoned Jenks and went fishing instead.

But after a little he came to a decision, laughed and flung his head and turned down the road. The trees closed about him so that he walked a while in shadow; but after a while he began to see, through the interstices between their leaves, the broad and sun-drenched valley, peaceful and serene below, and he went more swiftly down.

He had completely forgotten to telephone for repair men to come to mend his car; had even forgotten his intent to buy groceries at the Corner store. Such haste was his to come back to the valley where was June—who had not married Pot Riddle after all.

CHAPTER X

OVERLOOK, returning the day before to the valley where his boyhood lay, had found in his first glimpse of June something which raised up old memories before his eyes, which seemed to open rifts through the clouds that veiled the future. The belated recognition of the apparent fact that she was married to Pot checked this process of awakening in him; Will Hepperton's revelation of the actual state of affairs loosed it once more. Only, as he turned back toward the valley, hurrying toward her, he had a moment's faint fear; stopped on the border of the wood and stood, considering. It was as though his instinct discovered danger in the situation now; as though still warnings whispered in his heart and bade him hold and draw aside. But he brushed these misgivings behind him and his feet took wings; and he dropped down the rocky, rutted road through the wood and came

to Pot's place and turned into the farmyard, sought the kitchen door. He moved in haste, as though time lacked for what he meant to do; but he had not at all considered what this was he meant to do or say.

It had not occurred to him that she might not be here; but though he knocked two or three times, nowhere within the house did any movement sound. The kitchen was empty, the kettle steaming lazily upon the back of the stove, the place all put to rights and readied for the day. "With the baby somewhere," he thought, and knocked again, resoundingly, till at last he was convinced she was not here, and he felt ludicrously disappointed and went out toward the barn to find Pot and ask for her.

But Pot was nowhere near the house; off somewhere in the fields no doubt. And Overlook, walking slowly back toward the road, kicked at the turf in an astonishing dejection and grinned at himself while he did so.

"Forgot your groceries, too," he said derisively. "And forgot to telephone about the car—like a darned fool!"

He was amused to discover that these forgetfulnesses did not greatly distress him; it seemed to be of no particular moment that he would have to walk back up the ridge to the Corner again. There was here no haste or hurry at all; no particular tasks awaited him; nothing but the quiet routine of life; nothing to do but live. To have wasted in this fashion an hour or two of his New York day would have been little short of sacrilege, but the hours here were of small account. There were so many of them, drifting peacefully.

He came to the road, and he was about to turn up toward the Corner when he heard the sound of a voice—the voice and the laughter of a child. It came from the brookside toward the bridge. June must be there, he thought, with May's children, whom she tended; and he went that way, moving slowly, willing to see her without himself being seen.

As he approached the brook he heard splashing water, and the little girl laughed again. The child must be wading, he decided, on that sand bar at the lower end of the pool below the bridge.

A moment later he saw her; and beyond, at the same time he saw June lying there.

The pool was bordered with alders, which reached out above the water before rising toward the sun, so that their fronts were like the bosoms of wind-swollen sails. At its upper end the old bridge crossed; a bridge of weathered planks and timbers laid on great squared logs. The gray birch with roots like a ladder leaned from the bank at the west abutment of the bridge. Upstream there lay the forest, through which the brook came singing over the shallows, dancing and splashing as though disturbed by the feet of children running there. Below the pool, across the lip of the sandy bar, the water tilted smoothly, curled over a hidden log and cut deeply into the bank beyond. And downstream, too, the brook was screened with alders; so that save from the bridge the sand bar was not visible. It lay in a pit of sunlight banked with green; and across it, as the brook flowed, there flowed a little current of cool and healing air.

June, when her morning's tasks were done and no others immediately waited, liked to come down

here from the farmhouse and lie for a while along the warm sand. She had come thus today, carrying the baby, not yet a full year old, and leading small Junie by the hand.

Junie was active and gay; she was sure to get into the water, so June took off the child's simple garments and laid them by. The baby she set on the sand; and he was content, tasting bits of wood, pebbles, grains of sand in the assiduous search for food which so completely preoccupies the infant mind.

And June herself, drowsy in the sun, lay along the bar while the baby crept beside her; and small Junie, moving contentedly in the shallows which lapped about her chubby ankles, splashed and shouted in the water there.

Thus they were when Overlook came upon the bridge; and he came quietly, and stood quietly, watching with a slow smile. Something clouded his eyes, something filled his throat while he watched. The little girl's round body, struck by the sun, was white as marble by the dark pool, pale against the tawny sand. She waded to and fro, stooping to pick up pebbles from beneath

the surface, squatting to slap at the water with her palms and shriek with delight when it splashed upon her. She sat down in it and slapped at her feet; she rolled on her fat stomach and kicked and dug with her hands in the wet sand. She discovered a frog with only its eyes out of water near an old stub by the bank, and cautiously approached the thing, studying it with a silent intensity of interest. Withdrew again without disturbing it, and presently forgot its presence there as she renewed her play.

June, Overlook saw, lay as though she slept; one arm was flung across her eyes, the other lay relaxed along the sand, half embracing the little boy baby by her side. She lay on her back; and her dress, that same blue dress scrubbed so clean, seemed to be pressed down upon her body by the sunlight, as though she were standing front to front with a thrusting wind. Save the slow rise of her bosom, there was no movement in her at all; not so much as a finger stirred; and her hair, loosened a little, slept about her sleeping head, kept from the harsh pollution of the sand by a handkerchief outspread.

While Overlook watched, unmoving, the little boy seemed to be weary; he relaxed, his head upon her shoulder. And Overlook saw her arm, whether in sleep or no, curl more closely about him, loose again when presently he stirred to resume his play; as though, even though she slept, instinctively she sheltered him when he came to her for shelter, released him when he wished to brave the world alone. The man discovered in this one gesture all the essence of maternity; found all the motherhood of woman in this one woman—in this one woman who was in her own right no mother at all.

And he thought, content to stand there thoughtfully, that there are many things in woman which may attract a man. He had known other women; though he had never married, yet he might have done so if he chose. There had been a girl who for a time was his secretary; she wore an efficient attraction day by day. She was gay when he wished gayety in her, quiet when he would be still; she had an intelligence he learned to respect and a friendliness at which he warmed himself. He had sometimes thought—his own un-

spoken phrase came back to him now—that she would be good fun as a wife for any man. He liked her, but he never longed for her and never spoke his liking; and she married a young bond salesman out of Harvard and he never saw her any more. He had seen other girls with youth and friendliness and laughter. There were hundreds of them at every big football game, and they were pleasant to look upon; so Overlook always managed to get tickets to the games. But he was content to look on them with pleasure and see them go their way.

And there were other women he had known who drew men about them, playing skillfully a skillful game, awakening a nervous fire. But it was a fire which burned without warming; there was in them no friendliness; it was rather the remote and cruel riddle of their hearts which made men seek them out.

“A riddle draws a man,” thought Overlook. “The sphinx was female too.”

He smiled faintly, watching the scene there on the strand. It might be, he confessed, the mystery

in June which enabled her thus to possess his thoughts.

"But I don't believe that's it," he decided. "Something else—something in her hidden. She's puzzling, but that's not all. Something besides. You can't help knowing she might be beautiful."

He felt the inadequacy of this; sifted and sorted and analyzed his impressions, seeking a name for them. And he became so absorbed in these speculations that he forgot to remain inconspicuous. He lighted a cigarette, and the movement and the flare of the match caught the little girl's eye, so that she stood where she was, in the shallow water, looking at him in a swift; discovering dismay. And then she turned and fled from him toward where June lay, and caught at the woman's garment; and June opened her eyes, lifting her arm that had shielded them, and she spoke softly to the little girl, then saw Overlook on the bridge the length of the pool away.

She saw him first while still she lay at length, turning her head that way; and he had forgotten

how blue were her eyes. She saw him and rose, smoothly, to sit erect, reassuming dominion over her body, ordering her limbs, adjusting her skirts to cover them. And she watched him gravely, and turned her head to speak to the little girl, and looked toward Overlook again.

He said ruefully, "I'm sorry I frightened her; tell her not to be afraid of me."

"They know if you like them," she told him, not accusingly at all.

He laughed softly. "Why, I do like them," he protested. "I don't know much about children, but I do like them, June."

She bowed her head a little, made no reply to this; and then she looked up at the sun. "Pot said you'd gone to the Corner," she told him. "I didn't look to see you back before noon."

There was no explanation he could make to her; he felt a faint chagrin. "I'm—on a vacation," he said lamely. "I refuse to be responsible and efficient for a day or two. I ran into Will Hepperton and talked awhile with him—didn't go to the store at all."

She did not comment on this, but he felt that

even her silence demanded a reply. "I've been wandering around," he continued. "Everything I see around here reminds me of something. A lot of things to think about." He added a moment later, "I saw your old house was closed. Will told me May died, and your father."

"Yes," she said slowly; not with sorrow, but as though these things were only a part of life, and life was not to be catechized. He was struck again by this; that there was no self-pity in her anywhere. And he looked where the little girl had gone back to her play again. June paid her no heed, revealed no least embarrassment in the fact that the child's round body was bare. He thought another woman in these hills would, discovering him there upon the bridge, have caught up little Junie to cover her—was sure of it.

He was even a little disturbed himself that this naked baby should play about so openly between them; and he chuckled inwardly at his own perturbation, even while he weighed and analyzed June's lack of it.

"It's curious," he said aloud at last. "Things seem to have shrunk here. I was as big when I

went away as I am now, I think. But the roads seem shorter and the houses smaller, and this bridge used to be a lot longer than it is now, if my memory is good for anything at all."

"I guess New York's so big it kind of makes us look little," she agreed, not critically, nor yet with humility.

"I don't think it's that," he returned. "But—I suppose a man grows. His perspective changes. Old things don't look so impressive."

"But they haven't changed a bit," she reminded him. "Old things mostly stay the same."

"It's the man that changes," he assented.

"Yes, you've changed a pile," she agreed.

He laughed softly, spoke with faint derision in his tones. "I remember you," he told her—"how skinny and long-legged you were. I was thinking this morning about seeing you climb the fence in front of your house one day when I went by to school. The only thing I really remembered was your leg—how long it was."

She looked at him gravely. "The day Pot wouldn't let you wait for me," she commented.

And he cried, "You remember too?"

"There ain't much happens here. Folks remember pretty near everything that does happen."

"I'd almost forgotten," he confessed. "I'd forgotten almost everything about this town, I'd been so long away. But things keep coming back to me today." He was astonished to discover that his hand was trembling. "I'm really mighty glad I came," he said lamely. "About decided to stay here a week or two, not go fishing at all—rest here." He felt momentarily a great load of weariness upon his shoulders. "I didn't realize how tired I was till I got here."

"Pot says you can't go till your car's fixed," she commented.

"I'd stay, anyway," he declared; and he added, not so much speaking his intent as improvising, "I think I'll get the place in shape, do some work around. I wonder if I can still handle an ax or a grubbing hoe."

"The house needs some shingles," she agreed; and he said quickly, "Well, I can drive a nail. I'll enjoy working with my hands again."

"A thing ain't work," she suggested, "only if

you have to do it. If you do it because you want, it's just a kind of play."

He laughed, conceding the point to her. "All right, I'll enjoy playing then." He added, "You can't imagine what fun I had, getting my own breakfast and washing dishes and putting things away. I expect they're just chores to you."

"It's the way things go along," she said; and he felt again that still philosophy in her which refuses to complain against any part of life because all life is good. She smiled a little then, her face transfiguring; he thought with a quick leap of delight that she had humor too. "It's getting on to noon," she said, and stood up, rising smoothly. "I've got to go back and get up something for Pot's dinner or things won't go so good."

She drew Junie to her and bundled the little girl's dress over her damp and protesting head. Overlook laughed at them, and then he said curiously, "You know, you're—surprising to me, your point of view on some things; things I've never thought much about at all."

"I expect you never had time," she reminded him. "But there's time for thinking here."

"Well, I'll make up for some lost time in the next day or two," he promised. And he called to the little girl, "Good-by, Junie."

The child looked toward him; and after a moment's grave scrutiny her small face broke in a broad smile. But instantly, as though frightened by her own temerity, she clung to June's hand, hiding behind the woman's skirts again. And June gathered up the boy baby and dug the sand out of his mouth and set him against her bosom. So with the baby in her arms, the child at her knee, she stood a moment there in the pit of sunlight.

"If there's anything you want me or Pot to do," she said, "you let us know."

"I'll call on you," he agreed. And—"You're very kind," he added, smiling. "And you and I will have to talk over the old times. I remember a lot of things about you."

She looked at him gravely then, but she made no reply; only turned with a nod and was hidden

among the alders; and Overlook, from where he stood, saw her presently emerge upon the rising ground toward the house, striding strongly, the baby still upborne in her arms. And the sunlight lay about her like a mantle rare.

CHAPTER XI

THE days stole away as though they went light-footed in order not to waken him; but Overlook perceived their going and perceived their guile. And sometimes when he was alone—he was much alone—he laughed aloud as though he had a jest at the expense of the very sun that rose and set so stealthily. And at first these days had an unreality about them, as though they were indeed passages in a dream from which he would presently rouse to find himself at his desk once more; but after a little this quality passed. There could be no unreality about a day in which he rose before dawn, and cooked, and ate the food he cooked, and cleaned his own dishes; a day in which he sweated over ax and bucksaw; a day in which he trudged up the steep ridge road to the Corner and saw Will Hepperton grubbing in the alder run; a day in which he found June and the babies on the sand bar

by the pool; a day when he broiled in the sun upon his own rooftree, extracting rotted shingles and replacing them with new; a day which ended with a body wearied and a mind at ease, ended in a long hour or two above the thick old Bible, and a dreamless and unbroken slumber. These days were reality; but by the same token, New York began to recede. He looked with some wonder at the spectacle of himself milling there in the vortex with so many others, seeing many men and knowing none, striving with every thew of his mind for the sake of a digit in a ledger at the day's end. Not here in the valley, but yonder there, after a time, unreality began to dwell; he had moments in which he was all incredulous of the recent past he had known.

For the remoter past now sought to claim him, catching at his heart with clamorous hands; and he submitted to these mute entreaties, smiling, amused at what went forward.

Overlook surrendered himself to this remoter past; he bought overalls at the store; he grubbed in the meadow, toward the southern end where the wood was creeping in; he cleaned away the

brambles and the briers which had choked the ancient burying ground against the flank of the ancient hemlock wood; he cut and stacked some birch for cordwood; he mended a weakened place in the chimney in the attic, replacing old bricks with new. The game pleased him; he played it as an adult plays with children, knowing it for a game of make-believe, but contented with his own pretendings.

He was not lonely; yet he wished sometimes for another to share these days with him. He might have talked to June. She did not avoid him, but neither did she seek his company; and though he saw her daily, it was for little moments at a time. He found himself sometimes faintly at a loss with her; felt in her a wisdom before which he was transparent; discovered in her a serenity and poise which he could in no wise break down. He even tried one day the experiment of reminding her of that ancient kiss which he forbore; hoped to evoke from her either denial or some faint confusion.

But she only nodded, said slowly, "Yes, I remember."

"I thought afterward," he told her smilingly, "that you seemed to be a little disappointed because I didn't kiss you after the others did."

"A man finds things like that to think," she agreed; but there was for a moment a dancing light in her eyes and he suspected her of laughing inwardly. So it was himself instead of June who was discomfited.

He had long hours alone, but there were many tasks to occupy his hands and many thoughts to fill his mind. Thus one day in the attic he discovered in a distant corner an old box, a packing box well filled with dusty magazines and packets of letters and ancient newspapers and books of account with backs blistered by dampness and pocked with mold. He spent one long day delving there, and each letter he read and each book he opened added a brush stroke to the panorama of the past which was achieving form and substance here before his eyes.

He found an account of the moneys expended in connection with the building of this house in which he sat alone; and he chuckled over them, amused at the comparison between the price of

lumber then and the price he had paid a day or two before for a bundle of shingles. And later he came upon the book in which his father had kept a record of the life of the farm; a record that included the birth of every calf, the arrival of every litter of pigs, the number of eggs yielded by the hens. Overlook found himself forced to a half-reluctant admiration of his father's abilities. The man had discovered, upon a time, that, at the price of feed, to raise pork was no longer profitable; so he abandoned that activity, resuming it two years later when the price of feed went down. He had lived by the book, systematically, with all his life in order; and Overlook nodded his approval, discovering in his father the roots of his own successes.

"But I went where there was more room to work in, that's all," he commented; "worked on a wider scale, so I've accomplished more."

The phrase checked him for a moment and he considered it; then brushed the thought aside.

At the end of the book, just inside the rear cover, he discovered a dozen entries recounting the major events in the life of the farm in more

detail. His own birth set down, and the pangs his mother suffered, so that he felt a constriction at his heart. And his sister's birth and her dying, in empty words that ached with grief, burning as dry eyes burn.

And then his mother's death, and how his grandfather died and was buried in the plot forever shadowed by the gloomy hemlock boughs.

Overlook found some amusement in what followed—a brief and formal recounting of how his Aunt Millie came to live with them; and how unreasonable his father found her, so that in the end their relations became so uncomfortable that she went away again.

“Walter and me will get on alone,” his father wrote thereafter. And below, a few disjointed lines: “Walter had a piece to speak at last day of school yesterday.” “Walter traded with Pot Riddle for a fish line. He made a good trade.” “Walter can work up a cord of wood near as fast as me.”

And at first Overlook smiled; and then he discovered behind these phrases the fact that his father, whom he remembered as a grim and

rather silent man, had been proud of him, and his heart tightened as he read.

It was this probing among old books and papers that led Overlook unconsciously to the point of writing down, himself, the thoughts that filled his days. He had never kept a diary; to do so had never occurred to him. But just now he needed someone to whom he might talk; words might order the confusion of his mind. So, one night, in the blank pages of this same old book, he wrote:

August 16, 1925: It's only six days since I left New York. But seems longer. I expect Jenks has raised a row and they're looking for me now. Someone's going to turn up here one of these days. Rather amusing to sit tight and wait for them. I'm entitled to a vacation. And the car's a good excuse. I had a man over from Augusta yesterday and he took it apart, more or less, and took the parts away. Said he'd be back in a few days to fix it up again. Car looks foolish, with the rear end jacked up and dissected. Al-

most embarrasses me to look at it. I suppose when he gets it fixed I'll go along. I've got the roof fixed so it doesn't leak now, and the chimney patched, and I cleaned out some around the sills of the barn today. They're rotting, and I'm going to get Pot to fix them. I get along comfortably. Pot brings things from the store at the Corner, and I do my own cooking. June offered to do washing for me; but I've managed so far.

I see her frequently and we're getting acquainted. She has a sense of humor that crops out now and then; but the big thing in her life appears to be her devotion to her sister's children. I whittled out a windmill for little June, and she made up with me and we're good friends now. June seems to approve. She seldom disapproves anything, though; she has a curious way of tolerating the world, accepting it, adjusting herself to it. There's a certain permanence about her; you can imagine her going on just the way she is forever. It must have been the existence of such women that led the Egyptians into worshiping the mother principle. Salammbo is full of it, I remember. I expect all the heathen

do it more or less. Not so heathen, either; except that the idea has been corrupted by the very human worshipers. But there's nothing corrupt about June. Anything she might do would be rendered clean and wholesome by her simply doing it.

He wrote no more there, drifted into reverie, and presently put the book away. But the second day after, he wrote in the book again.

August 18: I went up the brook today, miles through the woods. Fishing, theoretically. Took a rod and a box of flies along, but I wasn't too proud to take some worms too. Dug them behind the house where the water from the kitchen sink empties. I remember there used to be worms there when I was a boy, and I found plenty now. Over back of the orchard, at the angle of the woods by the river, there's a fine pool with a rip below, and deep water under the bank. I've been swimming there, bathing in the morning, since I located it. Saw some trout there, but they wouldn't touch a worm or a fly. So I went on.

The woods are thick, upbrook; it's like a swamp. I had to wade most of the way, and I must have gone miles. Maybe two miles, but it seemed longer. Quiet in there and no sign that anyone had ever gone that way. You could imagine a lot of wild things watching you. Got on my nerves a bit at first, but afterward I enjoyed it. I caught four trout, but I fished very little. The mosquitoes were bad. When I came back June was by the pool at the angle of the woods, drying her hair. She had been bathing.

He would remember always that moment when he came upon her there. It was late afternoon, toward sunset; he had stayed in the wood till the insects, thickening in the cooler hours toward dusk, drove him to retreat; and he came downstream, wading through the shallows, picking his way along the banks when the thicket thinned. For protection against the mosquitoes he had wrapped a great red bandanna handkerchief about his head. It hung from beneath his hat and he tucked it into his collar below, covering all his head except his face. He was very hot

and tired, and there were little welts on his hands and on his face where the insects had bitten him. So when from the depths of the wood he looked down a straight reach of the stream like a tunnel beneath the blending boughs and saw where the sunlight struck in to gild the water, he hurried forward with a quick relief, glad to come into the open land again. The bank on his right was high, but the water there was shoal and he kept to that side; thus anything on the bank above his head was somewhat hidden, and by the same token his footsteps in the water were lost in the stream's own plashing song.

Just above the pool he climbed up by footholds in the soft earth to the level of the open ground; and thus climbing, he saw her sitting a little way off where the sun streamed through her hair. She sat with her back toward the stream, her head bowed forward, her hair falling in a heavy fragrant veil over her face and down upon her crossed knees. It was almost dry and she was brushing it with slow strokes, her arms arching gracefully; and the nape of her neck was white as ivory, and her hair, shot through with the rich-

ness of the sunlight, was dull gold like a rick of straw.

After a moment, with a strong twist and jerk of her head she threw it back behind her, thrusting it away from her face with her hands, beginning to brush it again; and she turned her body sidewise so that the drying sun might still strike upon its rich cascade. So turning, she saw Overlook there, his head and shoulders risen above the bank; and his cheeks burned with slow embarrassment, and she laughed a little, lazily, as water chuckles under a round stone; as the brook laughed, tumbling in its play below. And then she saw the spectacle he made, his head shrouded in a handkerchief, his face welted by the bites of insects; and she laughed again, but in a tenderer wise.

He asked curiously, "Why do you laugh?"

"You look kind of funny," she explained, "with that handkerchief and all. And the mosquitoes have bit you all over."

He remembered then and chuckled too. "That's right," he agreed. "I must be a sight. Wait a minute, I'll fix that."

To do so he descended to the stream side again and knelt and bathed his hands and face in the cool water, and dipped his face to drink deeply, and dried himself and ran his fingers through his hair. When, thus cleaned and curried, he climbed the bank again it was to find that she had looped her hair into its customary heavy coil and pinned it fast; and she rose as he appeared and stood to face him; and it seemed to him the western sky behind her had a color that beat with a slow pulse across the world, like a metronome compelling all creation into the rhythm ordained. A thrush, somewhere in the deep wood, teetered on its bough and sang its silvery tune.

"Where are the babies?" he asked. "I never saw you without them before."

"Pot was home," she explained. "But I've their supper to get up for them now."

He saw she meant to be away, and he nodded. "I've mine to get, too," he agreed, and moved beside her as she turned downstream toward the bridge. "Trout," he added. "I took a few."

"They ain't so good this time of year," she commented. "They soften up some." She looked

at him sidewise. "You ain't supposed to catch them," she added. "Brook is closed fifteenth of July."

"It is? But—I was going fishing when I came up here."

"In this county," she explained, and then she smiled. "But no one's going to bother."

They went on together through the tall grass by the brook, picking their way between the occasional clumps of birch or poplar seedlings that were beginning the reconquest of this ground. He said no more, found nothing more to say.

But she said, by and by, with a glance at him, "This is out of your way. You can cut through the orchard to the house."

He would have spoken, checked himself. There was no way in which he could tell her that he found it pleasant to walk thus beside her, along the laughing little stream, with the still and lovely valley all around. So they bore on together, and they came thus to the road. She turned toward the bridge, then seemed to feel some further word was needed.

"You doing all right by yourself?" she asked.

"Need I should come over and redd up, or anything?"

"I'm very comfortable," he assured her.

She nodded, with head bowed, and went away from him across the bridge; and he watched her go, reluctance in his eyes, and questioning. He tried to analyze his own emotions in this moment. Just now, moving with her, unconsciously shortening his stride to match her own, he had felt them both in time and tune. There is a rule in such matters, a compulsion in rhythm. To move in unison is to tend together. A regiment of soldiers out of step is no more than a mob in uniform; but when their feet strike each upon the selfsame beat, battering the ground, they are no longer individuals, but have become an ordered and effective whole.

To see June now and then and talk with her had been amusing, interesting, a little bewildering; but to walk thus simply beside her for a little way affected Overlook in a fashion far too deep for words.

CHAPTER XII

HE discovered, as day by day he moved about the farm, so many things that needed doing; his eye, surveying his domain, perceived in it so many possibilities. They stirred in his thoughts, led him into an acuter observation of the estate of Pot Riddle, into a discussion with Pot of the man's affairs. He was, it appeared, equally free from hope and from despair.

"I can git along," Pot explained, "and that's about all. I can manage, long as I've a mind to. There's aplenty of cordwood I can cut and sell in a bad year; and I pick a few apples and I keep enough cows so's I can sell one or two, about every year. Mostly we raise what we eat on the place."

"You've got a first-rate garden," Overlook agreed. "Things seem to grow."

"Grow anything here, and good, too," Pot declared. "That land of mine cants to the south,

where the garden is, and things grow fine." He gave facts and figures. "And I never do no work on 'em either."

"You don't sell any produce, do you?" Overlook persisted, and Pot expounded to him the difficulties of marketing vegetables when the railroad is better than twenty miles away. Overlook began thereafter to study these obstacles, found amusement in devising means by which they might be surmounted. And he made something like an inventory of his own farm. There were in it, he knew, better than a hundred acres; but it might be indefinitely extended. The adjoining farms were long deserted; his nearest neighbors were Pot, across the bridge, and Will Jenison, better than a mile to the south, and Joel May—a distant relative of his mother's family—three-quarters of a mile along the old road to the west.

"A man could build up quite a place here," he told Pot, and Pot whittled at an old shingle ruminatively.

"Man over toward Fraternity spent a hundred and twenty-five thousand, they say, building up a ranch there, and then went bust in the end,"

he commented; and Overlook laughed and felt his blood warm to the challenge. Thus one current of his thoughts during these drifting days.

Physically he was active; he rose early, and it was the rule that from dawn till dark he was continually engaged. He worked without any system, doing the task that appeared before his eyes; he repaired a section of the stone wall toward the brook; he pruned, by guess and in his ignorance, some of the apple trees in the orchard, all gone to suckers now; he catalogued the weak spots in the structure of the barn, delving painfully under the old rubbish of the years, shifting the hay compactly into the mow; and when he knew his needs, ordered lumber to repair the rotted places. He oiled and greased the old farm machinery; and ground a scythe on the stone behind the house and woke his hand to its old cunning again as he swung the blade through the tall grass in the farmyard. There was no particular purpose in his work, no plan behind his movements. It was only that he was contented here, and interested; but through his thoughts there began to float vague schemes and dreams.

He had not considered his approaching return to New York at all—had avoided thought upon the matter. But Pot one day forced it to his attention. Overlook, passing through the woodshed to the pump one morning, stopped to look about the place with an appraising eye. It had, empty of wood, a desolate and lonely look; it had always been, when he was a youngster, well filled with four-foot lengths of birch and beech and maple; or with stove wood fitted for its future use. Now there was only a litter of chips, a few odd sticks so full of knots they had defied splitting. He decided that the shed should be filled again.

He had spent a day or two in the birch growth above the orchard, felling trees and cutting them into eight-foot lengths as they had used to do for hauling on the sledges in the winter. Had worked rather for the satisfaction of swinging an ax again than with any purpose in his mind. But now it seemed good to him to continue this, and he returned to the business. The sound of his ax rang through the valley all day long; and on the second day, since it still persisted, Pot came to

seek him out. He came up from the brookside, along the fringe, and Overlook discovered the chunky little man and paused in his work to fill a pipe; and Pot looked about him, and said soberly, "Falling some cordwood, eh?"

"Yes," Overlook agreed; "yes, I thought I would."

"Heard your ax," Pot explained. "And I kind of wondered if it was you, so I come over."

The other smiled. "Me, all right," he assented. And he added then, "I'm glad you came. I want to hire you and your team to come over and haul this stuff up to the shed for me. Spare the time all right, can't you?"

Pot looked about him at the piled logs, then back toward the house again. "Ain't right good hauling now," he commented. "I'd have to bring the hayrack. Cart ain't long enough. Be a pile easier to take up what you want now, and wait till the snow comes and drag the rest up on a sledge."

Overlook laughed. "Easier, I know," he nodded. "But I won't be here when the snow comes, you see."

Pot eyed him. "Then there ain't any sense in putting wood in the shed," he pointed out. And Overlook stood still, eyes clouding, this obvious truth bewildering his mind.

When the snow came, he remembered, he would be back in New York; and the Jap would be handing him his dressing gown, holding it while he slipped his arms into the sleeves; and Harkness would be serving him with that grave perfection which made of each mouthful a rite; and his days would be spent in the antiseptic efficiency of his office—when the snow came.

When the snow came in New York, there would be banks of it along the curbing; piled banks of ugly gray. "There is nothing uglier," he thought, "than dirty snow. You're always remembering how white and clean it ought to be. Like a soiled woman." Ruts to hold and trick the wheels; ice beneath his chains; the chains themselves imparting a grinding vibration to the whole car. Overshoes on his feet against the slush, and the dirty water running across the sidewalks when the sun was high; and a littered

mess in the streets like the mess in a sty—when the snow came.

When the snow came here in the valley by the Sheepscot, a man might welcome it. He remembered how it had used to hang in great festoons on the boughs of the hemlock in the wood; how green the boughs were in the sun between these masses of white. He remembered the great drift that always formed where the wind gusted and eddied past the corner of the barn. There was some trick in the currents there; the drift was—if the wind lay northwest—apt to be much the same. It sloped up toward the barn, was hollowed out upon its inward side, so that it assumed the form of a wave upon the beach in the moment before it breaks. He had used to dig tunnels in the concave side of the drift, build for himself a habitation there. How many years ago?

You could see an interlacing network of tiny trails all among the trees in the wood, and across the open lands a single line of tracks where a fox had trotted. Or, intruding in the swamp on snowshoes, come upon the trodden ways of the deer; or perhaps discover where a moose had gone

striding through four-foot snow, his belly never brushing its surface at all—when the snow came to the valley by the Sheepscot here.

He would be back in New York when the snow came here; when the vast still hush of winter lay across the valley, and the trees cracked in the night with the splitting frost and the air-tight stove filled the little house with its reassuring warmth. A good bit of knotted oak or beech, tossed into the stove at night, would still be alive in the morning, ready to spring into flame. And the snow sometimes drifted up against the windowpanes. Then the heat of the room within would melt the nearer crystals, so that against the pane itself there would appear an air space an inch or so in width between the glass and the snow. And above, on the clear glass, the frost would lay its ordered patterns clear.

His father and his grandfather and his grandfather before him had been here; when the snow came, so that the world could not come near, it might be that they would be here again. Sure no son of theirs need ever be lonely here. But he

would be back in New York, alone among millions, when the snow came to the valley where the Sheepscot chuckled in such friendly wise.

A century and more ago his forefathers had heard it chuckle so.

It had occurred to him at times to send away for a new iron pump to set in the well. His father had talked of doing so—had never reached the point. The old pipe was rusted well-nigh through, the water apt to be full of brown particles. Yet he liked the flavor of the iron.

“A new pump would taste of paint,” he told himself, “and the old one will do.”

It failed him sometimes; but he made small repairs with bits of leather, and he greased it where the plunger grated in its collar, and by and by it assumed new life and pride and served him well, and he was tremendously pleased.

“Any man with twenty dollars or so could buy a new one,” he told himself. “But not many could make this old boy do.”

A mechanic came and repaired his car. This made him uncomfortable; he felt the presence

of the great car in the barn like an accusation, reminding him that he should get back into harness again. He admitted that this was true, but he did not want to go. Yet whenever he went into the barn he saw the car standing there, its headlights watching him like disapproving eyes. The swallows were gone, but before they departed they had speckled the car in a saucy and impudent fashion. It seemed to reprove him for permitting this outrage, and he jeered at it one day.

"Good enough for you!" he pointed out. "Take you down a peg! What right have you to be proud and haughty, when you go all to pieces at a little hill—a hill I've walked up a million times? And you brag about your horse power—pooh!"

He threw a forkful of hay into the front seat to point his derision; he tossed more hay across the hood; he leaned a rake against one of the headlights. The car kept its dignity, disdained to take note of these affronts, reproved him in silence. One day, casually, he pressed the starter and the engine responded with its smooth and

even song as though to say, "See? I'm ready! Let me serve!"

He snapped off the ignition almost hurriedly. "You'll be setting fire to the barn next," he said reproachfully. "Now wait till I tell you, stay where I put you, rest while you can, while I'm resting too."

He rested by working from daylight till dark; and his cheeks, which had been plump, grew flat and firm; and his hands, which had been soft, first blistered and then scarred, and then caloused in the palms. He cut a new hole in his belt, and he felt with pride the firmness of his legs and arms.

"I'll show them some speed," he told himself, "when I get back to town."

He wondered, sometimes, how matters went there. The same old whirlpool, he told himself; the same men milling in their circles, circles forever narrowing. "If you go round and round, you'll set inward always," he thought; "come to a rest at last, sink, go down the spout instead of up. Never get anywhere going round and

round. Might as well stand still till you see which way to go."

When he closed his eyes he could see the sidewalks crowded like a bargain sale. "If you went anywhere you fought your way," he thought.

But here in the valley he could go where he chose and seldom see another man. If he crossed the bridge he might see June and the babies on the sand bar at the foot of the pool; might encounter Pot, moving with his head bowed as though absorbed in contemplation of the earth he tilled. But no one ever passed the house except Joel May. This man sometimes went to the Corner with his team to buy feed or dry groceries. A large, heavy man of a lumpish sort, with a round bald head beneath his hat, and wisps of hair. He and Overlook had, now and then, some talk. The man, discovering the house was habited, stopped there one day and stayed an hour. He remembered Overlook.

"Yore maw was my cousin," he said. "Guess I'm a kind of an uncle of yours. That car in the barn must've cost you something. Guess you've done pretty good for yourself, going away."

He stopped one afternoon late in August or early in September with some news to tell. "Been anybody here to see you?" he asked Overlook, and Overlook shook his head.

"Not a soul today."

"A man come to the Corner asking about you yes'day," Joel May told him. "Talked to Will Hepperton. Wanted to know how long you'd been here and all."

Overlook asked quickly, "What sort of a man?"

"Asked a lot of questions," said May.

Overlook described Jenks. The other shook his head. "Wan't him," he declared. "This was a bigger man, and kind of fat."

Neither Jenks nor Rand, his own office manager, was fat, and Overlook could imagine no other possibility; there was none other like to seek him out. "I guess he didn't want to see me very bad," he commented, smiling a little, "or he'd have come down. I was here all day."

"He come from Augusta way," Joel volunteered. He had, it appeared, no further information at command.

The intelligence left Overlook in some degree uneasy. He was, he told himself, his own master; yet New York was reaching out for him, seeking to reclaim him, to summon him back again. He made some calculation of time. Jenks must, he decided, have given him up and gone ahead with his fishing. He had expected to stay, Overlook knew, till about the third week in August; and he would call the office, no doubt, on his return to town, to berate Overlook for failing him. Thus alarmed, Rand—Overlook felt that he could guess Rand's move—Rand must have put a detective on the trail to locate his missing employer.

Overlook resented this. "They won't leave a man alone," he thought fretfully, and then perceived the justice in the matter. "But he's right, of course," he reminded himself. "It was up to him to make sure I wasn't killed in a smash up, or something, on my way. Tactful, too, to find out where I was without bothering me. Chances are he'll leave me alone now, let me have my fun."

Nevertheless, he was not reassured. Soon or late, he knew, the summons would come and he

would have to go. It was pleasant to imagine staying here; but when the snow came he would soon be sick of it. It was amusing to plan what he might do with the farm; and worth while, too, to teach new methods to this lorn community, dying where it lay; spur new life into the flagging currents of existence here. Amusing to plan, but other matters must engross him—larger matters. He could not spare the time for these small devices here.

He had hours when he refused to think about June at all; refused to consider her place in the puzzle which vaguely formed for his solution. But there were other hours when he thought much of her; and more and more he sought to have glimpses of her, and carried away from these encounters memory of her eyes, of her high head and steady lips and strong and fruitful form. Like a goddess, he told himself, and fumbled in his uncertain mythological lore. Thought of Minerva, but remembered vaguely that Minerva was involved in politics. "A suffragette," he told himself, chuckling. And he thought of Hebe, and liked the name, but

doubted the attributes were fitting. Juno he remembered for her jealousy; and June was, he thought, unlikely to give harborage to such a passion. The name of Ceres sprang into his mind, with a vague association of fruitfulness which appealed to him but did not satisfy his groping. Venus he discarded early; Venus was a hussy.

He abandoned the attempt to fit June into any ancient mold; she was herself; something of antiquity in her, and of the future too. And he thought much of her, with neither plan nor purpose in his thoughts; she did not merely engage his mind; she dwelt within it, filled it brimming full.

The incident which changed these mental processes of his and directed them toward a more tangible problem occurred on an afternoon in early September, the second or third of the month. He had gone to the Corner and stopped for a talk with Will Hepperton. It was a rainy day, and Will was in the house; and Overlook sat in the kitchen with him, Mrs. Hepperton busy around and about them, interjecting an occasional word.

And they spoke at last, as they were apt to speak, of June; and Mrs. Hepperton, a woman with a still and acid tongue, said sharply from the pantry, "It's about time her and Pot was marrying, if they're a-going to."

The two men were a moment silent; and then Overlook, controlling his voice, asked pleasantly, "But is she going to?"

Mrs. Hepperton was clattering dishes, did not hear; but Will replied. "That's what Pot tells around," he said.

CHAPTER XIII

A RAINY afternoon, that; one of those days of slashing rain which sometimes come in early September, which the country folk are used to speak of as the line storm, the equinoctial storm, whatever the date may be. It had rained the day before; the wind was easterly, north-easterly, with a gust of fog, torn ragged by the intervening hills, that had been blown in from the sea. It would rain, no doubt, tomorrow. The equinox was still near three weeks away; but Will Hepperton, commenting upon the rain, said "Line storm" this afternoon. And he predicted that the wind would come around southwest in a day or two and the weather would be fine.

"But it's a good, hard-working storm now," Overlook pointed out. "The sort of day to sit and do some thinking."

"Blowing some, outside," Will commented.

He meant, Overlook knew, outside the purlieus of the land, out on the open sea. "I was down Vinal Haven way for two years, 'bout ten years ago," he added. "On Hurricane Island for a while. A day like this she blows some there."

Overlook was inattentive; his thoughts were busy with his own concerns; and after a time he left them, stopped at the store for a pound of coffee and a packet of pancake flour, which he wrapped under his oilskins when he started homeward. As he climbed the hill out of the Corner, the rain lay behind him; he had it on his flank when he swung north along the shoulder of the ridge; then its violence abated as he turned down into the dripping shelter of the road through the wood. His boots sucked and slid in the greasy clay and he stumbled over bowlders, and about him and over his head the rain slashed hissing through the leaves, already wearing the gayer hues of fall. There were even, he saw, leaves on the ground, leaves beneath his feet on the wet road. "If this wind were northwest, we might get snow out of it," he thought, and the

drops running down his cheeks were wet upon his lips.

But for the most part he gave small heed to the rain, to his surroundings; his thoughts were all absorbed. He found some amusement in the situation—in the contemplation of himself and Pot in rivalry. Himself and the chunky little man, moving always with his eyes upon the ground. Then smiled and pushed the thought aside. There was no rivalry between him and Pot; June interested him, but he had certainly no desire to marry her. This stay was in his life an interlude, no more; a wakening of ancient memories; an evanescent and rejuvenating contact with the soil from which himself had sprung. But it was, he perceived, a sorrowful business that June, whose eyes were on the stars, should marry Pot, who walked in contemplation of the earth beneath his feet. A fate faintly pitiful.

He reproved himself for this point of view. "It's what she wants," he thought, "what she expects, the end she's manifestly destined for. To bear him children, and rear them, a litter of them, with her sister's children." She was, he

remembered, that manner of woman; a woman frankly fashioned for maternity; one of those women fit to be mothers of the race, like a piece of fallow ground that lies smoking in the sun.

"So why should I pity her?" he asked himself, and slid and stumbled past Pot's farm without turning his eyes that way at all. But he found it something of an effort to keep his eyes forward, his feet upon the way; and his pulse tugged at his throat. A piece of fallow and unseeded ground that lies smoking and steaming in the sun.

"Don't be ridiculous," he insisted to himself; to that inner self which, without argument, yet by its very silence and calm confidence seemed to clamor to be heard, seemed to bide its certain time. "Don't be absurd," he argued to this self within himself. "You can't help it; you can't help her. There's nothing you can do for her unless you marry her."

And that not even his charity and kindliness were like to lead him to. He could hardly think of marrying June, taking her back to New York,

to meet his friends who dwelt there. She was cast in so different a mold.

He had sometimes gone, on Sunday, to spend the day at the home of his friend Cash, on Long Island. This in the spring or in the fall. Mrs. Cash presided over this home in a fashion he had always admired. She was a charming woman, cultivated, traveled, with a capacity for appreciation which made it possible for her to discriminate between the good and the bad in every form of art; he had, figuratively speaking, sat at her feet. To go with her to a concert, to the opera, to the galleries, was in itself an education. It was also a pleasant experience, because she was not only charming to her companion, she attracted flattering attention everywhere. She was beautifully groomed; her complexion had a finish that was perfection; her hair was never disarranged, unvaryingly ordered, day by day—the same crisp, compact little waves. She and Cash were complementary, ideally happy, their intercourse upon a plane of courtesy and gentleness which Overlook found charming.

They had no children, and they both regretted this; spoke of the fact with a certain wistfulness. She was beautifully slim, like a tall reed which can bend gracefully.

Rand's wife had children. She came sometimes to the office to see Rand, and Overlook had observed her there. She was always a little flushed, a little hurried, her eyes full of a faint concern, as though she feared not so much what had happened as what might occur. Her hair was usually vaguely disordered; and her garments sat upon her, instead of clothing her smoothly as the other woman's did. Yet her life, too, was full of large affairs; she was, Rand had told him, president of her woman's club and very active in small charity bazaars. He dismissed her from his thoughts with a shake of his head.

Holmes had a sister whom Overlook had now and then encountered. She had studied art in Paris, now lived on Fourth Street in a studio where there were sometimes gay little suppers, amusing, leaving a man faintly tired next morning. That, Overlook remembered, was a characteristic of most of his social encounters in New

York. They left him a little tired in the morning. There were usually cocktails, mixed by some man older than Overlook who yet wore a factitious youth, and the traces of the barber shop were always on him; there was sure to be dancing, and the women with whom one danced either ignored the physical contact with an ostentation that accented it, or they languished against his shoulder, embarrassed him unspeakably. And there was sure to be a great deal of talk, in shrill tones; his head sometimes ached for silence. He could not remember an occasion when he had sat with a woman, neither of them speaking, each content to be still—not in New York. Such an experience was, of course, a commonplace with June. He liked to watch her, careless whether she spoke or not; and she never seemed to feel any duty to talk to him.

He tried to imagine what she would be like in these other surroundings; and he turned his thoughts this way, expecting to be amused. But he was curiously stirred and moved by the possibility. She would have, of course, new dresses to wear; her hands could, he felt sure, be

smoothed and softened by a proper care; and she would sit in some great chair like a throne, still and remote, smiling down upon these other little women and these men. Not scornfully, he knew, for there was no scorn in June; but rather with that fine quality which was a part of her, that gift for accepting life because it was life, accepting it and finding it good.

Mrs. Cash, he decided, would undertake her education; she would enjoy the task. She knew how to appreciate the fine things in life; so she must appreciate June.

Under her tutelage June would learn a smoother and more ordered diction, would learn what things to approve and what to reprehend, would learn the little graces of the world.

He thrust the thought aside with a physical gesture. Ridiculous dreaming, nothing more. To transplant June was impossible. He himself, for all his fifteen years among them there, still wore crudities; he knew this; his most intimate acquaintances sometimes told him so—women, that is to say; women who knew that a man receives kindly criticism from a woman as a compliment.

But he had gone there as a boy, while June must be thirty or past; and if fifteen years had failed to perfect the smooth veneer he had so painfully sought to acquire, how hopeless must be the task for June.

He perceived these truths sorrowfully.

Now if he ever married it would be some such girl as that secretary who once served him so well; the one who married the bond salesman out of Harvard; the one who knew when to be sober and when to be gay; who wore a fine friendliness and inspired a kindred feeling in those whom she encountered; a girl whose sex appeared only in her gentleness of spirit and her will to please and heal and rest the man for whom she should come to care. Not such a one as June, who was woman superlatively and exclusively; woman and nothing else and nothing more.

He thought of another woman, another girl. She was a dancer, a singer, the star of a comedy with music, which he had helped to finance. He remembered her stage name, but knew her best as Molly. And he remembered how an hour with her used to be a long hour of laughter touched

with a certain ardent tone. She used to kiss him with the frank friendliness of a child whenever they encountered; with that carelessness to be expected, he had always told himself, of one who kissed professionally, night by night, there upon the stage. Yet she was woman too; one never forgot that; provocative, challenging, impudent, consoling, gay.

"Or such a one as that," he told himself. "If she would have me I might marry such a one as Molly was."

He felt himself an alien among these women in his thoughts; saw himself in their company, awkward, embarrassed, withdrawn, watching them, receiving their occasional gesture as a dog beneath the table receives the furtive bone, with tapping tail; and found himself abruptly full of a fierce resentment and anger at them all, who held themselves so fine.

Overlook came home through the rain and set his house in order; and he cooked and ate his evening meal and cleaned away thereafter; and for surcease from his thoughts, through the long evening in the little house, where the rain played

across the roof and stroked the windows soothingly, he turned to the books upon his father's shelves in the parlor there—turned inevitably to the great Bible in the end, and leafed it idly through. And by and by he came upon words which fitted to the pattern of his thoughts; phrases leaped out to strike his eye. He read them, now and then, aloud: "For the lips of a strange woman drop honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil. . . . Her ways are unstable and thou knowest it not."

And of another woman: "She is clamorous and willful; her feet abide not in her house."

And again: "With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forceth him away." Molly, to the life, he assured himself amusedly.

So he came at last to a phrase that held his eye:

"A worthy woman who can find, for her price is far above rubies. . . . Strength and dignity are her clothing and she laugheth at the time to come."

He read again: "'Strength and honour are her

clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.' ” And his throat filled. “June, to the life,” he told himself. “ ‘Strength and honour are her clothing.’ June, for sure.”

He took the words to his bed that night; and he woke with them in the morning, and thought again how sad a thing it was that such a one should marry poor Pot Riddle, and bend and bow here beneath the burdens life might find for her.

“I could take her away,” he thought, “teach her what she needs to know, make a beautiful woman out of her.”

He was more and more sorry for June all that long day.

He did not see her, for the rain held, and the fields swam in water and the road was a brook on its own account; and when he went down to the Sheepscot he found that stream almost bank full of a roiled and turbulent torrent, boiling and tumbling there. So most of the day he stayed indoors or in the barn and shed, engaged in little ways that left his meditations free.

And more and more he thought how sad a

thing it was that June should marry Pot; how finely charitable it would be if he should offer her escape and freedom and the fuller, finer life he knew.

He reached the point of considering ways and means. "She could go to school," he thought. "I needn't marry her till I see how she comes out, how she develops. But she has something that deserves developing; she's worth giving a chance to. Give her a good dressmaker and someone to take her in hand; there's something in her—genius perhaps." It occurred to him that she might conceivably have in her fine throat the gift of song; and his thoughts cast ahead half a dozen years to a resplendent night at the opera, and her triumphing, and himself filled with pride when she brought to him her gratitude.

"Chances are she has a singing voice like a crow," he reminded himself. "Don't be more of a fool than you have to, son."

Yet it was still a pity she should marry Pot; a pity, and a shame too, he decided—an offense, in short; and his indignation waxed at the thought.

"I'll talk to her," he conceded at last grudgingly. "See what she wants to do, let her decide for herself." Then began to muster arguments that would justify this plan of his. "I've known her all my life, owe her a chance, since it means so little to me. And if she prefers to stay here and marry Pot, why, then I can't be blamed."

And the rain still held and the night came down, and he slept at last, still formulating and bolstering this charitable plan.

The sun rose clear and warm, and the wind that was southwesterly played with a caressing hand across the valley; and the drenched earth steamed as the morning mists arose, and seemed to sigh and to suspire beneath the wind and sun.

He did not go to seek her; still sought for fitting phrases. Their ways would cross within the day, or soon; and he could wait till then, and be more sure of what he wished to say.

Their encounter came, as it chanced, toward dusk. He had finished his supper and his later chores; and because it was pleasant to be abroad after the rain, and because the air was very fresh

and fine, as though it had been washed all clean, he decided to walk to the Corner. He could not expect to meet her; she would be at this hour within doors. Yet the hope may have been hidden in his mind.

He left the house and strode toward the bridge. The sun had set half an hour before, the valley was a pool of clotting shadow in which at a little distance still objects became like moving forms, and moving forms seemed still. Ahead of him, against the flank of the ridge the dark wood lay; and as he approached the bridge he saw the structure vaguely, shadowed by the old gray birch at its nearer end; did not immediately discover her figure standing there; did not know her till he came almost to the bridge itself.

And when he saw her, and saw her turn to look toward where he came, he checked for a moment and felt his heart rebound and then leap on again. And he went on, and so came to her side.

She said softly, "The trout are rising." So they stood, listening above the pool; and he heard by and by the low, bubbling splash of a big fish

sucking an insect down. "Hear," she adjured him; added softly, "They were busy, just before you came."

The wind had died, the air was still, she was very near. So for a little he could not speak at all; and she must have remarked this in him, discovered something of the man's emotions; for she turned to look at him, long, and her eyes were dark and deep and wide against the pale oval of her countenance.

He heard himself speak, in something like a gasping sigh, as a man near dead of thirst cries out for water: "June, June, I want you to marry me!"

Heard his own words and was struck into a terrific consternation, into a vast and bottomless dismay. He who had thought so lucidly; he who had planned so charitably; he who had meant to go so cautiously—he was committed now.

CHAPTER XIV

THAT cry of his was no predetermined plea. "June, June, I want you to marry me," he said stammeringly; and it was as though the words were drawn from him, from some inner part of him which he did not fully know, by her deep eyes. He heard them issuing from his lips; and he had his moment of blank and complete dismay at this thing he had done, at the fact that he was thus committed. He was, it seemed to him, a lost man; and into his thoughts flashed an absurd picture of himself, in the faultless garb his Jap knew how to set upon him, entering a brightly lighted ballroom with June, in her scrubbed clean blue dress, upon his arm. He saw June opposite himself at that exquisitely appointed table in his own dining room; and he was eating, ceremoniously, as though he followed a ritual, a fillet of sole; but she was eating baked beans swimming in sugar and vinegar, while

Harkness, disapproving, hovered by. He would lose Harkness, Overlook thought; the man could never endure such proceedings.

And he saw himself and June and Mrs. Cash in a gallery hung with gaudy canvases done in the modern style; seemed to hear Mrs. Cash explain, in her smooth and cultivated tones, the symbolism, the beauty, the soul of the painting before them; seemed—he had sometimes wished to ask the same question on his own account—seemed to hear June ask honestly, “But what is it meant to be a picture of?”

So he stood now in a cold sweat of dismay at his own predicament. And the dusk thickened all about them till June was no more than a motionless shadow by his side; and beneath them the brook flowed, rippling with little laughing sounds in the shallows above the bridge, still and calm across the pool below, then chuckling again as it danced away through the ribs below the pool and lost itself in the dark wood below. The old gray birch bowed above their heads and the last thrush was still. The owl hooted somewhere, near or far away; and something splashed lightly at

the water's edge below them, and a dog barked on the hill; and a car rumbled over the bridge two or three or four miles downstream; and in the meadow to the west of them there lay a singing silence full of movement imperceptible, as though the shadows there were populated by attentive shades. He remembered—old fragments of his youth were forever coming back to him—he remembered one day his father spoke to him of the Haradeen girl, of June. Could not recall the words, but knew some comment passed, and that he himself had been pleasantly embarrassed.

"He and old Jim were friendly," he thought now. "They might have planned——"

It was easy to imagine that his father, grubbing the sprouts along the margin of the meadow in the darkness there, had paused to watch what went forward on the bridge. This was a night when such things are possible; a night when the wind speaks in whispers and the dark seems listening.

About June, emanating from her, a little warm cloud hung; he was within its skirts, and his senses swam. It may have been a long time

after his word was spoken before either of them found further word; it may have been long or short. But it seemed to him interminable, and her silence drove him into speech at last. He said softly, "June."

She had, when he first spoke to her, turned aside from him, her eyes leaving his to look down to the pit between the alders where the brook lay, as though the stream, a living and immortal thing, might have counsel for her in this hour. But when now he spoke again she turned to him once more. Their eyes encountered; and even in the darkness, after a time, his turned aside. Off toward the house, Pot's house, he could see the yellow glow of a lamp-lit window, and he said in a tone that strove to be casual, "I didn't expect to see you tonight; I was going to the Corner." She did not speak. "Is Pot at home?"

"He was in early," she explained, "and the children abed. I like to come out at night."

"You like to come down to the brook, don't you?" he commented, and he saw her nod.

"It keeps going on, all the time," she agreed, as though this were sufficient explanation. He

had found in her again and again this still appreciation of whatever was eternal; this clinging to the immortal and undying things. Remembrance hushed him now, and for a longer while they stood in silence. There was a rail along the bridge; a rail of rough poles supported on bars of iron, arching up toward the center as though to form a truss to support the timbers of the bridge. Where she stood it came breast-high, and she leaned upon it with her folded arms, brooding there. She was so still he thought himself forgotten; and he moved uneasily, felt curiously like a criminal waiting for sentence, thus standing there.

"It's still tonight," he said at last, desperately; and after a moment she replied. Her tone was low and gravely kind.

"I heard what you said, Walter," she told him.

He steadied his voice. "Well, I meant it, June," he declared stoutly. "I wish you would."

"Pot wants the same thing," she murmured, half to herself, not looking at him. "He's always after me, too."

His indignation rose in protest. "You mustn't

do that!" he cried. "You mustn't marry Pot. You mustn't ever do that."

She nodded slowly. "I know what you're thinking," she agreed, her soft words scarce audible. "I know what you mean. You don't think very much of Pot, and me, and the children, and the farm here. It looks kind of small to you. The way you said one day. You don't think much of Pot, I guess."

He protested in deprecation. "Why, Pot's all right. He's a good man, I'm sure; and a good farmer, for this town. His place is in shape and he gets along. But that's all he is, June—just a small farmer, walking along with his head bent and his eyes on the ground."

"He works the ground," she suggested quietly. "That's his business—to study it and watch it and find out what it'll do. A man gets to walking that way." She added, with something like a smile in her voice, "And watching the ground that way, you don't stumble much or get off the right road."

He laughed confidently. "But you don't see much of the world," he reminded her.

"Nobody can see only about so much, if they want to see it plain," she countered.

"Oh, June," he said appealingly, "you'll never marry Pot. He's too little for you; you see things too clearly."

"May married him," she said. "And May was fine."

"But she died!" he pointed out, and added swiftly: "Oh, I don't mean to hurt you, June. But she did die. And you'd die, too, the fine things in you—that I can see. Married to him, struggling for a living here, working all day long."

She did not immediately reply; and he said at last, "Are you unhappy? Thinking of May?"

"I was thinking about you," she explained.

He smiled. "What were you thinking, June?"

After a moment's hesitation she shifted her posture, erectly facing him there in the darkness. Her face was a pale shadow in which dwelt the deeper shadows of her eyes.

"Walter," she asked, "go on and tell me what makes you want me to marry you."

He felt a momentary shock of that half-for-

gotten dismay; he had been led by her word of Pot to plunge deeper into his dilemma, and there was no escape for him now.

"I can do so much for you, June," he urged. "You see, I'm rather a wealthy man. Enough, at least, so that we can have just about any sort of home you want. An apartment for a while, with the sort of things you've never known. And I want to see you not have to work so hard, buy you pretty dresses, read good books with you and see fine pictures and hear beautiful music. I can make you mighty happy, June." He was still a moment, added with sudden passionate heat: "And I can't bear to think of you staying here, the same, day after day, growing old and tired."

"You don't need to be sorry for me," she told him; and he sensed a faint warning in her tone.

"It isn't that," he assured her. "I know you're not sorry for yourself, June. But I can give you so many things you don't even know about, make you so happy, if you'll let me do it for you, June."

Her posture changed insensibly, and again

there was a suggestion of slow mirth and mischief in her words. "Is that all there is of it?" she asked him.

He was troubled, uneasy and embarrassed. "We're adults," he reminded her.

"I can remember, plain, when I was a little girl."

He laughed at that, moved a little nearer, and his voice wore tenderness. "I remember, too, June," he agreed. And he added soberly: "I know what it is you want me to say, June. I'm—not used to this sort of thing. But I do love you." Her head drooped a little and he spoke more quickly. "I keep remembering more and more about you when you were a girl," he told her swiftly. "And I've seen so much of you while I've been here, seen how wonderful you are. I do love you, June."

He laughed then, and he added swiftly: "And, June, I can see things now that I had forgotten. You wanted me to kiss you that day when you were just a baby. And I can remember how you used to look at me in school, and you always wanted to walk to school with me. And I remem-

ber you came to the door to say good-by to me the day I went away. And, June, you've kept my house clean and in order all these years—for me. June, I see now what these things mean. You can't pretend to me, June; I know you've remembered me all this time. I think you've always been in love with me."

He checked himself on the word, and he stood trembling, waiting for her to speak. He expected her quick denial; expected at least evasion.

But she said gravely, "Yes, Walter, I've always remembered you."

The night was still and warm, and the brook was chuckling, and she faced him steadily; so he had her in his arms, not roughly but with gentleness. She did not protest or seek to draw away; her lips met his, accepted his. But he found in her no yielding or response at all, but just acceptance; and he drew away, holding her by the arms, watching her, till some understanding came to him, so that he said sorrowfully, "What is it, June?"

"I've always remembered you, Walter," she

confessed again. "But—you've changed a pile in fifteen years."

He laughed at her then. "You've said that before, June. Of course I've changed."

"I'd have gone with you fifteen years ago," she said honestly, "anywhere."

"You couldn't," he interjected. "I had nothing—just enough for my own way."

"But I can't go with you now," she concluded, as though he had not spoken, and her tone was all finality.

He drew back a little, and he ached with a great sense of loss, of something gone from him. He remembered that her word should have been a relief, a release; should have meant escape from his predicament. When he asked her to marry him he had instantly regretted the asking; but now that she would not, he was miserable. So he groped for understanding, seeking to avoid the issue.

"You mean—May's children?" he asked at last. "We can take them with us, June."

She shook her head. "I'm no hand at telling

things plain, I guess," she confessed humbly. "Maybe you can't understand. But, Walter, I was born up on the ridge here, and my folks have been here for a hundred years; and I want me and mine to go on being here." She hesitated, made a slow strong gesture. "I want to go on myself," she cried, slow passion in her voice. "I want to leave cleared fields that my man has cleared, and growing trees that he's planted, and children of his. I've got my roots here, in the ground here, Walter; and I've got to stay here. You can't move a grown tree far or it's going to die on you."

"This whole town is dying, June," he protested uneasily. "Folks moving away and farms abandoned."

"You went away," she agreed. "It was hard for you here, and you'd been wanting to go; and when your pa died and it was so you could, you went away. But Pot, he's stayed, and others have stayed too. And I'm a-going to stay."

He protested: "That's just ignorance, June. You don't know what the rest of the world is like." His tone softened. "I expect you're afraid

—afraid of the people you'd meet. But you're better than any of them, June. You don't need to be afraid. You'll get to know them quickly."

She said, without any resentment, "You think I'm not as good as them, Walter. I know. But I don't think so; I ain't ashamed of being what I am, and I ain't afraid. Only, I don't want to go, and maybe change, the way you've changed."

"Rather change, the way Pot has changed?" he challenged.

"Pot has worked—hard," she suggested.

"So have I," he cried bitterly. "I've done well, June."

"Pot has kept the farm working for him," she said gravely. "You've made money and got it in the bank somewhere. But it's come out of you, Walter; and what Pot's done has gone into him."

"Bent his back and bowed his head," he told her.

"Yes," she agreed; "yes, if you go to look at things that way."

They were silent for a while then; she had, it

seemed, no further word to say; and he sought to escape from the net in which he was enmeshed. He had always that capacity for looking at himself with a dispassionate eye, for smiling at his own absurdities. So now he was amused that he should seek to justify himself to her; amused that he should refuse to accept the escape she offered him. Yet at the same time his thoughts were swift, seeking any opening. He tried putting the case again:

“See, June; see if you’re not a little unreasonable. I want you to marry me and come away; I want to show you fine things, show you fine tasks to do. If you marry Pot you’ll stay here and work for the children.” His heart caught at this thought. “They’ll grow up on the farm, and little Junie will marry a farmer and work hard all her life; and the little boy will work for Pot around the place and own the farm some day—if he doesn’t leave home the way I did. I can take them and send them to college and give them a start, give them a chance at life.” He was pleased with this picture, thought it must move her, elaborated its details.

But when he was done she said simply, "They're Pot's."

He had forgotten this, and for a moment it silenced him. But he said then, "You'll have children of your own, June. That's bound to be."

"Yes," she agreed; and the low word seemed to ring. And after a moment she spoke to him again gently. "I'm right sorry, Walter," she said. "Sorry about you. I expect you're a kind of lonely man. I don't expect you've got any friends." He laughed protestingly; but there was confession in his laughter too. "Oh, you know a pile of folks," she conceded. "But you're lonely just the same, with four men to wait on you because you pay them to. I'm sorry about you, but that can't be helped. And I'd rather stay here, Walter. I like here."

He was unable to find words; and after a moment, with a lorn cry, he swept her into his arms, seeking to move her by the old appeal; but when his cheek touched hers he felt it wet and knew she had been crying while she spoke to him, and he was abashed by this.

"June, June," he cried, "you love me!"

"I always did, Walter," she confessed.

"You've got to marry me," he pleaded; and she was trembling pitifully. "June, you've got to. You can't argue against the way you feel, June. Things will work out so you'll be glad. We'll work them out together, the way you want them to be. We can do it, June. I am lonely; I've always been lonely, without knowing. I need you to be with me. I think I've always needed you, June, always been lonely for you."

"I've wanted you," she whispered. And she whispered on: "I used to go and redd up your house and think of you being there, and build a fire in the stove and cook things, and wash up and talk to you. I was lonesome too."

"You see?" he cried, in laughing triumph. "You see? It's bound to be so, June. You've got to come away with me."

She was so still, he thought for a moment he had won; sought with his lips for hers. But he found only her wet cheek instead.

"You've changed, Walter," she told him again. "Maybe you belong there; but I belong here."

I'd rather be here. I like here. You'll have to go along."

"And leave you to marry Pot?"

She pushed at his breast and he relaxed his hold so that she drew away and freed herself. "I guess so," she said a little wearily. And when he would have caught her close again she drew away, and when he spoke her name she turned and was gone, running away from him. But he heard a sound from her like a choking sob.

Then the still night received her to comfort her, and the warm wind touched his cheek as her warm breath had done.

But the brook chuckled softly there beneath the bridge.

CHAPTER XV

HE saw her no more for days; and he moved thoughtfully, busy with self-searching, self-communion, uncertain what to do. And he debated taking his departure. Whenever he went to the barn he saw the great car there, littered with hay, racked with farming tools; and he cleared it of this rubbish, and cleaned it, and once or twice he tried the engine and found it always ready to serve. And one day he went to the attic to get his bags and bring them down and pack them; but a glint of light between the shingles revealed to him a leak in the roof which he had overlooked, and he left the bags where they were and went to get his ladder and replace the rotted shingle there. He thought much of going; would not permit himself to think of the possibility of staying. But day by day he stayed.

Once or twice frost stole by night into the valley, touching the wooded flank of the ridge

with a crisp stroke that transformed the birches into yellow plumes, the oaks into a red flame and the beeches into embers dying there. Only the black growth, hemlock and spruce and cedar and some pine, kept its stalwart green. The hillside became a fine mosaic, an ancient tapestry woven with party-colored strands. It would be an early fall, he guessed; the winter would be long.

Joel May, passing on his way from the Corner, stopped one day and Overlook went into the farmyard to talk with him. The man was curious, and frankly so.

"You've been here quite a spell," he suggested.

"Near six weeks now," Overlook agreed.

"Be leaving pretty soon, I figure," May commented. "Getting back to the city pretty soon."

Overlook smiled; it amused him to evade the other's veiled inquiries. "I haven't fixed a day," he replied. "A good many things to do around here still."

"Anybody'd think you was figuring to hire out the farm," May commented, "the work you've done around. Only, there ain't anyone like to rent or buy."

"No," Overlook agreed. "No; I'm just keeping things up, that's all."

"Go to pieces again soon as you git back to the city," May reminded him. "It takes a man all his time. Can't keep up a farm and stay in the city too."

When by and by Joel drove away, his curiosity still unsatisfied, Overlook turned back to the house with gloomy eyes. He felt absurdly sorry for himself because they were all expecting him to go. Because no one—save perhaps June—seemed to want him here or urged that he should stay. And not even June had urged his staying; she had merely refused to go away with him, to leave the valley here. She, too, he decided, expected his departure; she did not cross his path, did not come to the farm as she had sometimes used to do. But Pot came now and then, always with some word of indirect inquiry.

"Like a buzzard watching for a thing to die," Overlook thought bitterly, and pitied himself most profoundly.

One day a letter came from Rand, his office manager. He got it when he went to the Corner

for supplies; but he did not open it till he was at home, in the dining room, sitting at the table there; studied it then with a slow and inattentive eye. It was typed upon his office stationery, his own name in block letters across the page, and the address below, and the date, and the formal salutation. Yet each one of these familiar details had about it unfamiliarity; came to him like moments from the past, strange and nearly incredible. The very phrases of the letter were the curious and meaningless phrases of a dream. "Mr. Cash and Mr. Sigbert——" "——my duty to have your movements traced." "Confidential." "Intercity Traction." "In your hands." "Flotation." "Promoter's stock."

Cash. Sigbert. Half-forgotten names. The McGuire agency had searched him out; they would not let a man alone, let him escape from them. Intercity Traction. His thoughts diverged, considered the rocky and rutted road from his farm to the Corner. That ought to be repaired. Two or three thousand dollars would put it in fair condition, make passage to and fro less difficult. The roads hereabout were almost all bad;

if they were improved, a truck could carry produce to market in Augusta. . . . He wrenched his attention back to the letter in his hands.

"Pool." The word caught his eye, and he thought that the farmers hereabouts could all combine, work together, market their stuff together, if they had someone to organize them, someone who understood such things, some good man. Such possibilities appealed to him; his fancy leaped ahead, pursuing many plans; he had to twist his eyes back to the letter again.

He perceived that there was nowhere in it any touch of human anxiety or solicitude; nowhere an appeal for his return on any personal ground. Only a certain awe, a certain timorousness, and an anxiety for profits vanishing.

"The man's afraid of me," he thought; "just plain afraid of me."

His eyes lifted from the letter and rested thoughtfully upon a painting on the dining-room wall. It represented a lake set among the mountains; on the bosom of the lake, against the flank of the farther hills, there were a dozen white-sailed craft. In the foreground lay a cove with a

sandy beach where—the painter had lacked skill in his handling of perspective—the water seemed to run uphill. At the nearer end of the cove there were gnarled and rugged oak trees, two inches high; at its farther end a palm half as tall as the canvas. As a boy he used to go sometimes to the Corner to fetch home the mail and his father's paper; and while his father read the paper by the lamp upon the table, he would lie upon the couch, looking up at this painting on the wall, waiting his turn at the news. His grandfather had bought the painting, he remembered; bought it from a man in East Harbor because he liked the carved and gilded frame. Here it had hung thereafter, to awake old memories now. The house was, Overlook thought, full of such memories; he would never be lonely here, where his forbears kept sober company, where June might sometimes come—might some day dwell.

And he thought again, hopelessly, "But soon or late, I've got to go back, just the same."

It had been late afternoon when he came home from the Corner with Rand's letter; he sat there

by the table till dusk began to fall and the room grew dark about him, the letter in his hands. When he saw that the time had come to light the lamps, he rose and went into the kitchen and set match to wick; and he found that he was curiously tired and at the same time nervously alert, his movements more swift than their later habit had been. The familiar tasks, lighting a fire in the stove, cooking his supper, setting the victuals on the table, faintly irked him; he went about them in impatient wise, and when a cake burned to the frying pan he scraped out the charred fragments angrily. There was something familiar about this feeling, this resentful haste; and he stopped at last to analyze it, to discover what it was.

"The way I used to feel, right along," he thought grimly. "I'd forgotten the sensation, loafing here." Yet he had not, he perceived, been idle here at the farm; had not been loafing; had in fact worked from dawn till dark, day after day. "But it's rested me," he discovered. "I've slept and I've eaten, and I've lost some of my fat. It's done me good."

All to be undone, in a little while, when he should go back again.

If he could take June back with him, it seemed to him, things might be otherwise; he might better support the routine of the days. He wished it might be so, and he felt a nervous resentment at these intangible tuggings which sought to draw him from the farm. On a sudden impulse he got Rand's letter and dropped it in the stove, and felt a quick relief and smiled.

"Let him wait," he told himself aloud. "Let him worry for a while." He felt guiltily that the letter needed a reply, but—"I'll answer it tomorrow," he promised, compromising. "There isn't any hurry now."

When his tasks in the kitchen were done he went into the dining room again and set the lamp beside his shoulder there; and for a while he lost himself in contemplation. As always at such times, June came to him, came before his inward eye; and there seemed to be comfort in her coming now. The little house was very still. The night was cooler and there would be, he thought, a frost before the dawn; but the fire in the

kitchen stove diffused sufficient heat so that he was warmed even here, warmed, too, by the glowing lamp beside him. The doors and windows were all closed, so that from the night outside no sound came in to him at all; he was cloistered here, secure from all the world.

"I'll have to drain the radiator of the car," he thought, "if the nights get any colder—or get out of here."

Wherever his thoughts turned, he encountered this dilemma, faced the necessity of determining his plan. If he were to go he might as well go quickly; the season grew day by day more stern. But if he were to stay, then there were many things to do that must be done. If he were to stay——

He laughed at himself at the thought; it was an absurdity even to think of staying. But if he stayed, June would come to him; if he bound himself to stay. Not for a month, nor even for a winter, but for always; then she would come, to go forward by his side. And he found himself for the first time considering, straightforwardly,

this possibility; considering what he might do if he stayed.

He had before this had casual thought that there were tasks to be done across the countryside; but he had always hitherto thought of them as things that other men might do. Now they were more personal. This farm of his to be brought to bear again; to bloom with garden stuff, and roots for the cattle, and meadows stout with hay. That southward-facing slope across the road where the old orchard was, toward Joel May's; that to be bought and apple trees there planted, and tended till they bore. The forest growth to be disciplined; waste trees removed and seedlings set; the ax where it was needed; and the systematic harvest by and by. The roads to mend, and a fleet of trucks that should collect produce hereabouts and bear it marketward. "Intertown Traction," he thought, and chuckled at the thought. The farmers to be inspired and helped and led. . . . His thoughts ran on; saw, somewhere in the future, the rebirth and rejuvenation of a town, of a whole countryside.

"A job worth a man's doing," he told himself; and was for a moment humble. And then laughed unhappily and shook his head. "Absurd!" he said aloud. "Absurd!"

He went at last to bed, these matters in his mind; and when he slept they came to move among his dreams, in bright shapes and pleasant, beckoning forms—curiously like the form of June.

Pot came next morning, on some casual purpose; but he stayed to talk a while, to speak of the frost which had fallen the night before, of the approaching colder weather, of this and that and other things, lingering volubly. Overlook watched him, listened to him, himself said little. But at length when for a space the other was still, to sit whittling long shavings from the sliver in his hand, Overlook moved and lifted his head.

"Pot," he said, "I'm surprised you and June haven't married—before now."

Pot looked up at him and nodded, and dropped his eyes to the sliver again. "I been telling her we might as well," he agreed. "She thinks a heap

of the children too. And a man needs a woman in the house. I been telling her so."

"What does she say?" Overlook asked, curious and unashamed. "How long is it since May died?"

"I reckon she'll come to it by 'n' by," Pot replied indirectly. "She don't say she will nor she won't. Kind of wait a spell, I guess, is the way of it."

Overlook nodded without comment; and after a time Pot added soberly: "I did think, one time, I'd marry Joel May's girl. That was before I married May. Joel's girl ain't married yet either. She's as good around the house as June." He spoke judicially: "She ain't the figure of a woman June is, but she's got more to say." Shook his head then, thinking aloud. "But the children take to June," he concluded.

The silence became awkward; and Overlook said in a tone carefully casual, "I haven't seen June for a day or two."

Pot looked at him gravely. "She used to talk about you, before you come, sometimes," he commented. "Don't have so much to say about you

now." He added inquiringly, "I guess you'll be going back pretty soon."

Overlook hesitated, and then spoke on sudden impulse. "Yes," he said; "yes, I'm leaving, pulling out. I'm starting tomorrow morning, Pot, right after breakfast. Drive through."

Pot received this information soberly. "June was asking if you'd gone," he explained. "I come over this morning to see."

"Tell her good-by for me," Overlook instructed. "I've a lot to do, getting ready to go; probably won't get over there today."

When Pot was gone he waited, pleased with his device, with the expedient to force the waiting issue. June now must come to him, he thought; she loved him, she would not let him go.

"She'll give in," he assured himself. "She'll go with me. Or she'll come to beg me to stay." And he watched for her all that day, his eyes along the road across the valley. But he was not so confident that she would come as he pretended then to be; sought to deceive himself with these pretendings.

"She'll come before lunch," he thought. And

then: "She'll come this afternoon." And then: "She'll come after supper." And finally, when it was too late for her to come that day, he went out into the night, thinking perhaps to discover her lurking pitifully in the darkness there. And he went along toward the bridge, watching for her in the shadows, expecting to see her coming toward him along the sandy road. And then he thought she would be on the bridge; but when he came to the stream she was not there, and Pot's house on the knoll across the valley was all dark and still. So he knew she would not come that night at all.

"But she'll come in the morning," he persuaded himself, "before I've gone, to clean up the breakfast dishes and lock the house behind me. That's what she'll do."

And—"At least she'll come to say good-by!" he cried forlornly in the night, trudging back through the deep sand toward the light in his window there.

But he did not even pack his bags to go; thought of it once, and decided that the morning would be ample time. But in the morning when

he woke—and he had slept only fitfully—he went about his breakfast preparations as though this was but a day like every other day.

At nine o'clock she had not come; and suddenly he smiled, then laughed aloud. "She knows I won't go without seeing her," he cried. "She's playing a game with me."

And abruptly, as though upon inspiration, it occurred to him to play a game with her. He would pretend to stay, pretend to settle down for the winter here; then soon or late she must surrender, must suppose that she had won him over to her mind.

"And when we're safely married," he thought, "then I can take her away; I can persuade her away."

He was immensely pleased with this expedient; when a qualm distressed him, he put the thought aside. "If I do deceive her," he told himself, "it's for her good in the end. She'll forgive me by and by."

So he persuaded himself, and he wrote to Rand that for the present he would stay where he was. Instructed Rand to make some rear-

rangement of his interests so that they need not require his eye. And he took the letter to the Corner, walking so swiftly it was as though he bounded on the way; and when he came back down the ridge, the valley seemed to him to beckon and to smile.

CHAPTER XVI

HE had been, these six weeks past, like a man in a dream; it was now as though he began to waken to reality again. Each way he turned, it was to discover some new attribute of the farm or of the old house which he had long forgotten; the past, the long past of his youth, which was by some strange mystery the future, too, came flooding back to him. He remembered old tasks; and when they were done, further tasks awaited doing.

The business of making one of these small and isolated farms ready for the long rigor and ordeal of winter is not unlike the preparation of a vessel for an extended cruise. The place must be put all in order, within and without; must be strengthened to oppose the elements and provisioned to withstand the siege of snow. Overlook, chuckling to himself, attacked this business; and he went about it with an eager joy that was at

once reminiscent and anticipatory. But he did not—this was his whim, for her bewilderment—he did not seek out June. Instead, he kept on his own side of the Sheepscoot and he worked the short days through with industry and zeal.

In the manner of an emissary, Pot came to him upon that day when he was to have gone; came after him when Overlook returned from taking to the Corner his letter for Rand. When Overlook reached his own place and looked back Pot was just crossing the bridge; and a moment later, after Overlook had gone into the house, Pot came to the kitchen door and knocked, and at Overlook's hospitable call, came in. Overlook greeted him cheerfully; there was a high good humor in the man today.

"Hello there, Pot," he said.

Pot scratched his head. "I looked for you to be gone by now," he said.

"No," Overlook told him quizzically.

"Late starting, ain't ye?"

"Oh, it isn't so late yet," Overlook rejoined.

"Something wrong with the car?"

"Don't know it, if there is."

"Nigh onto noon," Pot insisted; and Overlook laughed again.

"Guess I won't get away today," he confessed. "Not today."

Pot nodded; but there was in his eyes a vague bewilderment; and he scratched his head again, running his fingers under his cap.

"Funny," he confessed. "June, she 'lowed you wouldn't go."

Overlook's quick interest was caught; he had a faint misgiving. "She did?"

"Yup," said Pot. "When I told her, she thought it over for a spell, and then she kind of laughed. I says to her, 'What you laughing about?' I says. And she laughed some more, right out. And she says, 'I don't 'low he'll go.' "

Overlook's ears burned; and then he chuckled in his turn, and at the same time he had a warm pleasure because he was so transparent in her eyes. It was, mysteriously, flattering that she should read him thus; that she should be so sure what he would do or what he would not do. It was as though between them a bond existed; as

though across the valley they communed; as though her spirit walked with his.

He had, during the succeeding fortnight, more than once this thought again; had more than once this feeling that she was watching what he did and waiting the appointed time. He saw her, save for passing glimpses, only once during these days; she came to the house on a warm afternoon, with little June beside her; and she had a basket hanging on her arm, and set jars and glasses out upon his kitchen table, without looking at him, with little explanatory phrases.

"I thought you'd be wanting some preserves," she explained, "if you're staying on. And I thought I'd bring 'em over, because after the snow comes it won't be easy to get over any more, all this ways." She seemed, within herself, to smile. He spoke his gratitude. "This jelly's made out of Gravensteins," she told him, ranging the glasses side by side. "Pot's got two good trees of 'em. And these blueberries I picked over in Palermo, on that hill this side of Joel May's, and put 'em up. And the mincemeat—Pot shot

us a deer last winter, and we made mincemeat out of it, what we didn't eat."

"Venison?" he commented politely, a twinkle in his eye. "I don't believe I ever tasted mincemeat made of venison."

"Likely your ma used to make it, only you wouldn't remember," she told him. "And if you decide to go along back, one of these days, you can take the things with you well as not, in that big automobile of yours."

He saw faint laughter in her sidelong eyes; but he responded gravely: "I'm likely to do that. I'd enjoy introducing venison mincemeat to my chef."

She said gravely, her eyes toward his, "I wouldn't want you to go just a-purpose." And he found words difficult, could only answer, "No." But he added then, "I won't go without sending word to you."

"You figured to bother Pot," she accused him, laughing again. "I could see what you was aiming at."

"If I do decide to go," he promised, "I'll come and tell you, word of mouth, June."

She bowed her head. "I never looked for you to stay so long," she confessed; and then as though her own words had confused her, she took up little June and went away from him, and he was left to go about his tasks again.

There were a thousand things to do. He had to solve the dual problems of fuel and of food, and each demanded sure solution. There was down timber in the hardwood growth below the orchard, wind-stricken beech and lightning-shattered oak. The birch he had cut during the last month or so was not yet fit for burning. So he attacked these old windfalls, from which the sap had long since drained; and he brought from the store at the Corner a one-man crosscut saw, and ground his ax, and worked the stuff into lengths fit for hauling. It could be fitted for its uses at his leisure, in the shed.

He thought of hiring Pot to do the hauling for him; but Pot was often on his own account engaged, and this arrangement was so unsatisfactory that after three or four days Overlook took the car and drove to Augusta and bought a horse and cart there. He left the car, stored

it in a garage against his later coming to reclaim it; and when he drove back, the long miles seemed endless, and his later life seemed by the same token to fall infinitely far behind. He came late at night to his own barn, and stalled the horse there and fed the creature with grain he had brought in the cart; and next day he was at his hauling, so that he had presently sufficient store of wood to last him for a certain time.

The air-tight stove in the dining room was all in order; but the section of pipe which had connected it with the chimney flue was gone, somewhere put away. He had some search to find it, wrapped in paper in the attic and well greased against the dampness and the rust. When it was in its proper place he lighted a fire in the stove and the grease fried in blue smoke and burned away.

He was beginning by this time to remember in more detail how, when he was a boy, they had been used to prepare the house for winter's harassing; and he recalled that they used to bank about the sills with leaves held down by boards and bits of plank. But this could wait; it was

not yet sufficiently cold to make such measures necessary; and also the leaves were not yet fallen. Later, when the ground beneath the hardwoods should be carpeted, it would be an easier matter to rake and load them in the cart and haul them for their purpose here.

So, when he had wood and when the stove was ready, he attacked the problem of provisioning. The cellar would be needed for storage; and when he investigated there he found it in some disorder, full of moldered barrels fallen into shooks of staves, and dusty jars and rusty cans and shattered bits of board; and there were rat holes in the walls, and spider webs, and all the ancient rubbish of the years. The cellar, he decided, had gone untouched, had felt no hand since his father's and his own; and he attacked with a robust vigor this Augean task. The bulkhead doors were nailed; he pried them open, flung them wide. The windows were nailed shut, and in one of them a pane of glass was broken. He replaced that pane, manipulating the putty and smoothing it into place with a sensuous enjoyment. All the old rubbish that was combustible

he carried into the yard and burned; and when the cellar was bare he scrubbed and brushed and dusted it, and sprinkled it with lime; and he left the bulkhead and the windows open so that currents of air blew through.

He worked with a furious industry, scarring his hands and wearying his muscles, so that he came to the end of each day tired and full of sleep. Yet he did not go early to bed. This business of preparing for the winter woke in him so many memories that he sought to expand and to confirm them, studying night by night his father's old book of accounts and all the records of the farm. And there were other nights when he opened the thick Bible and bent above it, on the dining-room table beside the glowing lamp. He read one night:

"Now King David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat." And he thought of his grandfather, huddled in the sun, shrouded in his shawl.

And he read: "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed." And he chuckled, thinking, "Isaac must have

been chopping wood that day." And then sat more soberly again, thinking how June had seemed to him at times like a fallow field that lies smoking in the sun.

And he read how Jacob said: "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel." And he thought, "Then I certainly can stick this out six months or so for June."

For he still persuaded himself that he stayed here only as a subterfuge to win her to his side.

And on another night he turned to those recording pages in the midst of the great volume and searched them through, considering the dates, bringing to life before his eyes the persons whose passing was recorded there. Read: " 'Minnie Overlook, July 8, 1864. She had blue eys.' " And read, a line or two below: " 'Chester Overlook, July 3, 1876. Of stomach.' "

And a moment later, with a faint start of recognition, saw three or four lines in his own hand; the record there set down of his father's birth and death, and then below:

" 'This entry made by Walter Overlook, the fourth, born August 2, 1891. I know no other

descendant of the original Walter Overlook who is still alive. I am the last of the line.' ”

And he remembered with what decision he had written the words, feeling as he did so a dramatic value in the act; and he remembered, too, how a moment afterward he had seemed to feel about him in the old room ancient presences, who looked on him with disapproving eyes. He touched the lines with his finger tip, stroking them, feeling the faint roughnesses where his pen had scratched the glaze upon the paper; and he sat a long while, looking at that which he had written, considering it with sober eyes. Till by and by he smiled a little smile.

He bought supplies at the store, hauling them in the cart down the rocky road. A barrel of potatoes and a barrel of flour and a barrel of apples; two or three bushels of turnips and carrots and beets—"roots" in the local term. He bought half a dozen squashes yellowed by the frosty sun; and he bought a bushel bag of beans, and smiled as he ordered a barrel of sugar and a ten-gallon cask of vinegar too. He bought coffee and baking powder and salt and tea;

abandoned himself to an orgy of purchases, yet held at the same time to a certain austerity, limiting his prospective fare, willing by the manner of his life this winter to link himself more closely to the past. To do this meant, he remembered, that salt pork must be his staple victual; and he made some inquiries at the store and of Will Hepperton; and he learned that Joel May of custom raised a considerable number of pigs. Accordingly one afternoon he went afoot to Joel's farm to dicker with the man. There made his trade; the pig to be slaughtered, the hams and bacon cured, the pork salted and the sausage ground.

"But wait," he directed, "till the weather's colder, till it will keep in my cellar."

Joel was complacently pleased. "You'll like my Poll's sausage," he promised. "She makes as good as anybody I ever see."

"Mrs. May?" Overlook asked, and Joel shook his head.

"My daughter," he corrected. And Overlook remembered suddenly that Pot had confessed an ancient impulse to wed with this young woman.

"Guess I've never met her, have I?" he asked.

Joel shook his head. "She ain't to home to-day," he confessed. "Pot Riddle come and took her off to the fair over at the Trotting Park in Liberty." He added irresistibly: "He used to be around here a pile, 'fore he married May Hara-deen. I guess June figured she'd lay holt on him when May died; but my Poll she's a smart girl when she has a mind, and it's time she was marrying."

Overlook felt rising anger, but amusement too; felt also a quickening pulse at this word that Pot was seeking Polly. On the homeward way he wondered, considering the matter; wondered whether this might mean that Pot had had his final negative; that June had bade him find himself a wife abroad—clung to this hypothesis.

"I've won that much at least," he told himself. "She's seen she can't ever marry him."

September passed and mid-October came, and the hillsides which had blazed with color were assuming now a duller hue as the bright leaves fell and the gray limbs and branches of the trees

reared stark as skeletons. And one night there was a flurry of snow that lay white against the black growth and beneath the hardwoods; and across the meadow it melted as the sun climbed the sky, and the dun grass broke through, assuming brighter colors by contrast with the whiteness of the snow. And toward sunset, the snow that lay in the shadow of the barn wore a veil of blue.

He made no haste toward June. He saw her now and then, by chance or by design. But there was in the words that passed between them now a lighter tone; there was more often a smile in her eyes or a smile in his; they wore each a certain gayety, as though all sober things between them had been said and only happy laughter waited now. He made no haste toward June, content with the passing of the days; content with the slow growth of time, savoring life as it was and life as it was to be. And his thoughts went yearningly down the long vistas of the years. And he fell into June's fashion of going sometimes to the brookside to watch the water flowing there; flowing as it had yesterday,

and did today, and would tomorrow. Discovered for himself, by slow and pleasant ways, that in this valley where the present lay so peacefully lay also all eternity.

One day in mid-October he saw Pot by the bridge, and went to him and spoke of buying a cow. "Two cows in fact," he explained. "That horse of mine gets lonely in the big barn there, and I've hay enough to winter them. And I remember you said you sometimes have a cow to sell."

He dickered with the man, chaffering amiably, relishing this encounter; he went to Pot's tie-up to see the beasts Pot recommended; he appraised them with what he hoped was a wise and a judicious eye.

"Father always did the milking," he confessed. "But I guess I can get onto it in a little while."

Pot nodded and spat. "You won't have any trouble," he promised. "Them two, they give down easy, to me or anyone."

The trade was not immediately consummated. The tie-up in Overlook's barn needed some small repairs. "I'll get it ready for them in a day or

two," he explained, "and fix up the fence along the lane. Get some wire from the store. Won't try to pasture them till spring."

"They don't need a fence," Pot declared. "They're clever; and if they do stray off they'll just come along over here."

Overlook chuckled. "Don't want to keep having to drive them home," he remarked. "But I'll be ready for them by tomorrow night."

"I'll drive 'em over," Pot agreed, "any time you say."

Overlook next day engaged himself in preparations for their coming. He replaced broken boards in the tie-up, repaired the cribs. There was much to do; it occupied him all the morning, and he returned to it in the afternoon. There would be needed staves, to set upright in sockets there provided, pinning the necks of the beasts between; and he remembered a growth of oak trees on a knoll behind the orchard, where for this purpose saplings might be found. So, early in the afternoon, his ax in hand, he went that way; and he went through the orchard, noting as he passed the ravages which time had made

among the old trees there, and he came to the knoll.

To these young oaks the leaves still clung, crisp and brown; and the grass beneath them was brittle and dry, crackling under his feet. He searched to and fro for saplings that would serve his end, and found one and felled it with a stroke on either side, and trimmed away the upper end and looked about again. Moving to and fro, he rose a woodcock sunning itself upon the knoll there, and it whistled away into the black growth toward the brook. And the level sun cast long shadows on before him as he moved. And he turned by and by and saw June coming through the orchard toward him there.

She had a little knitted jacket on; and her head was bare and the sun behind her seemed to thrust her on toward where he stood. He looked at her as she approached; and he felt a tumult in him, deep and full of strange affright and full of comfort too. And then she was near; and she watched him, and he stood still, his ax head on the ground, a sapling half stripped of its branches like a lance in his hand.

"Hello, June," he said smilingly.

"I could hear your ax," she explained, "so I could tell where to look for you."

He questioned her: "You wanted me?"

She seemed to feel, now that she was come to him, that no need for haste remained. There was a boulder near, and she sat down upon it.

"I didn't aim to bother you," she apologized. "You're such a powerful busy man."

He chuckled. "Surely am," he agreed. "Never did work so hard."

"Pot says you've gone and bought a couple of cows off of him," she remarked, and he nodded.

"Yes; getting staves for the tie-up now," he explained, and began to chip away the branches of the sapling in his hand.

"One cow'd be all the milk you'll need, and more," she suggested, "it looks to me."

"Well, I'll tell you," he said gravely, "I'm not sure I can milk a cow, and I thought I'd have a better chance with two of them than with only one."

"Was that all the reason?" she asked, and he hesitated. His glance swept off to the open land

above the orchard where he had thought a truck patch might be set.

"Well," he said, almost reluctantly, "I've got that hay in the barn; they might as well be eating. And I'll need dressing for the garden in the spring."

And after a moment, he chipped at the sapling again. She watched his bent head thoughtfully, and presently she smiled.

"You talk like you was figuring to farm the place," she hazarded.

He looked at her then, and he said gravely, "Well I don't know how long I'll be here. I may be quite a while." Seven years, it seemed to him in that moment, need not be so very long; eternity unrolled ahead.

And June, sitting on the boulder in the sun, smiled across into his eyes. "It just looked to me," she explained, her lips half smiling—"it just looked to me that if you was going to farm the place you'd need a woman by."

CHAPTER XVII

HIS wife was to Overlook a mine of delight and of surprise. There was about her the richness of good fruitful soil; and there was in her at times the humor of a girl; and there was always a rare composure and a still strength upon which he could lean. And their hours were full and fine.

One day in January, after the second great snow, they tramped together far up the Sheeps-cot through the wood, the broad webs clacking on their feet, the stillness of the forest all about. The upper snow was feathery; it clouded up around them to the waist as their snowshoes kicked it through; it clung to their garments like fine frost, and upon their legs caked and fell away and caked again. Low branches laden, disturbed by a touch, unloaded all their burden of snow upon the two who brushed below. They followed up the brookside, where open

water ran blackly in caverns beneath the high-banked snow. And they turned aside to avoid the tangle of a cedar swamp, and broke up through the hemlocks to the rising ground, and came back along this higher land, and so down through the orchard home.

The hour was toward sunset, and the snow was rosy with reflected light. Above them to the eastward rose the high rampart of the ridge, cloaked with skeleton trees and mottled with black growth here and there; and down the valley lay the meadow, and to the west the sun was bedding beneath a crimson coverlet. Upon the roof of the barn, and along the roof of the house, the snow banked high, its borders and its angles geometrically exact; and from the chimney top a blue ribbon of wood smoke meandered welcomingly. Thus they came to the warmth within.

While she prepared their supper he stayed in the dining room, and she saw him thoughtful. Because she was wise she did not ask him what his meditations were; but also because she loved him she was all concern, till he saw her worriment

and laughed, and said, "It's all right, June. I'm just feeling sorry for myself—for the way I used to be."

She used that tender asperity she sometimes showed toward him. "You were always one to be sorry for yourself, like any man." And went about her business of providing. But that evening, when the lamp glowed between them, she confessed to him: "When I see you thinking so, I'm always going to wonder if it's because you're sorry, now it's done."

He said teasingly, "Now what's done, June, that I should be sorry for?"

"Now you're married tight to me." And he laughed at her then, very gently, and knew how to reassure her, so that she said at last, "I've never really been afraid."

"I know," he agreed soberly. "You've always known; known what you were worth and what you could be to me, before I found it out at all. But I know now, June."

He had not always been so sure; was not al-

ways even now so sure as he pretended. But his hours of doubt were no longer so utterly desperate.

When, a little while after that day upon which she came to him among the sapling oaks, he went to Liberty to see the town clerk there, he had built firm his whole resolve; and he was, while he explained to the clerk his desire for a license to marry June, very sure of himself and of what he wished to do. They were to be married that day.

But it appeared that a five-day interval would be necessary; thus was the law designed for the protection of those who would rush too swiftly on. And when he heard this, Overlook wished to overbear the provision; but then a doubt broke into his mind, and he accepted the delay as an interval which might be used for last considerations; explained to June that it was necessary; that they need wait only this little extra while.

So during the first day of the waiting he began to question whether he did wisely; and through the long second day the question did harass him sore; and by the third day he was in a mood of

panic, fit for flight, needing only the resolution necessary to break the bonds that held him here and get away. It is easy to embrace delight with a rash and unconsidered ardor. But both danger and delight, when scanned overlong, may assume a fearful mien. Thus Overlook. He had time to think of many things, to contrast what his life had been with what it was like to be, to scan himself and discover how deep his resolution ran, to appraise his weakness and to discover all the weaknesses—if there were weaknesses—in June. And he was a very miserable man.

It rained that third day, or he would have gone; and the fourth day again it rained, with wet snow falling in the chill of afternoon and melting as it fell. But by that time his thoughts were all confused; he neither desired to stay and wed nor to flee and be free. And in this mood of harried hesitation he still waited, still sat thus supine, till it was too late to remove himself from that which so inexorably impended.

Yet, though it was too late, he might at the last moment still have fled but for one circumstance. They were to be married in his house;

and in the morning of the day, an hour or two before, while he was still alone, Overlook went so far as to seek out his bags, to think of packing them. But before he could begin this business Pot came to him to make sure that he was ready; came thus as emissary. And Pot had news of his own to tell.

He was right glad, he confessed, that matters had chanced thus. "I've always been a mind that I'd like to marry Polly May," he explained. "But June, she took to the children so, and them to her, that it looked to me I'd ought to marry her. She's a still kind, fit to scare a man. Times she is. But I'd done it if she'd 'a' had me. She hadn't any place else to go." But now, it appeared, he felt that June's future was provided for, and he and Polly were of a mind. "I'm right pleased it come this way," he said again.

So Overlook saw June as an outcast who had laid the world aside for him; had him or had nothing.

He had no high resolve; went, rather, resentfully to his wedding hour; went like a truant child dragged to its punishment, dragged to the

rigid discipline of a hateful school. Fretted inwardly, and fumed against the net of circumstance, and had no peaceful mind at all till, in the last moments before the words were to be spoken, he saw June again, and found his comfort and assurance in her sure and steady eyes.

She knew always how to comfort and to reassure him, and to delight him and surprise him too. In such a small matter, for example, as her clothing. He had hoped, when they were married, she would know how to use wisely the resources at his command; yet he half feared, half expected to find in her something of the narrow and blind frugality of these rigid hills, to find her strict in small and mean economies. But when, after they were married, they went to Augusta to fetch back the car, she was ready enough to buy the things she needed, and other things besides. Light vanities, some of them; and other garments that so long as she stayed on the farm she was never likely to require.

"But I can get the use and feel of wearing them," she explained sensibly. "There'll be times

we'll be away from the farm, and you'll want me to know."

He was amused also to find that she had her own ideas as to what he should buy. When he first plunged into the small tasks about the farm he had acquired overalls and stout shoes and a blue shirt of which he had become inordinately fond. But she changed these matters.

"A man needs work clothes," she agreed. "But he can have the right kind, and enough of them, and change when he's a mind." He found himself acquiring khaki knickerbockers and heavy shoes and khaki shirts of cotton and of wool.

"You'll have me looking like a gentleman farmer, June," he protested laughingly. But she made no comment, save her still and reassuring smile.

Afterward, when they were come home again, he discovered her afresh; he had been so used to seeing her in scrubbed and faded blue that the metamorphosis amused him, and amused them both. Even while she laughed, tears came in her eyes; but to his question she would only say, "It's only that I've always thought a lot about you,

Walter, and wondered if you'd be coming back again, the way you have."

And he said honestly, "I didn't know it at the time, June; but—maybe I've always been remembering you."

She said, with a smile behind her eyes: "There must have been something, or you never would have come—alone."

"I'm beginning to think I got the farm in my blood when I was a boy," he confessed gravely. "I like it more and more. It's where I do belong."

"It was in your blood before you were ever born," she reminded him, and smiled again. "And likely always will be," she predicted. June had always this way of casting back, and casting into the far future too.

Cash came to make a last appeal to Overlook. The snows held off; the ground froze and the roads were passable. So, early in December, Cash came.

When Overlook had the announcement of his coming he felt some doubts and fears; shrank from a possible ridicule, dreaded that he might

see June through the eyes of the other man; mustered to meet the ordeal a certain bold bravado. And because he needed her strength, he confessed this to June; told her something about the other man, described Mrs. Cash to her.

"This is the sort of life he knows," he said, and explained that life as best he could.

And she listened, with a grave attentive eye, and when he was done, nodded understanding.

"You're wondering if it'll be different with him here," she commented.

"I am, June," he confessed; and she smiled at him in a fashion full of wisdom.

"You can tell me when he's gone," she said.

Cash came in the late afternoon; a smooth little man, with a crisp mustache and white piping on his waistcoat and spats about his ankles to ward away the cold. He would, they had decided, stay the night. Overlook, in khaki, met him at the Corner and brought him home, down the steep road where the deep and frozen ruts made passage perilous, and the car Cash had hired in East Harbor bounded dangerously and lurched drunkenwise.

"I am planning to fix this road in the spring," said Overlook; and Cash surveyed him with a sidelong eye. Otherwise they had few words; and those they had were only of the countryside.

June came to the kitchen door as they turned in from the road. She wore a blue dress, for she was always thus inclined; and it was crisp and fresh, and it fitted her. Her hair was heavy and fine. And thereafter it seemed to Overlook that he was thrust aside; that between these two, the dapper little man and the woman of the farm, an interchange went forward from which he was excluded. They sat at meat about the warm lamp; and afterward Overlook and Cash were left in the dining room together while June was busy in the kitchen. But she was constantly passing through the dining room to the buttery at one side, so their talk was not of the visitor's errand, but of all the plans for the farm and for the valley and for the town which Overlook was beginning more and more definitely to form. And Overlook, who had feared that he might see June through the other man's eyes, began in fact to do so; to see her—and his heart leaped at the

discovery—to see her as strong and wise and fine.

When her tasks were done she came into the dining room and spoke to Overlook. “I thought I’d go over to Pot’s,” she explained, “to see how the children do with Polly May.”

He understood that she wished to leave him and Cash together; so he went with her to the kitchen door, and felt her lips press his and her hand grip his hand. And then he came back to where Cash waited in the dining room.

He came a little fearfully; but he need not have been afraid. For Cash, in his first word, reassured him. “I did come to talk you into coming back, old man,” he said frankly. “But I’m not even going to give it a try.”

“Oh, I’ll be back in the spring,” Overlook assured him. “Or, anyway, in the fall, after I get the orchard planted here and things started—in the fall.”

Cash chuckled. “I thought you’d gone crazy,” he declared. “Holmes and Sigbert and others will still think so—unless they come up here and see her and talk to her.”

"She's fine, isn't she?" Overlook agreed. The other man did not in words respond; but there was for a moment a twist of hopeless longing in his eyes. Then he laughed again.

"You know," he declared, "you belong here. I can see it now. You've always been a farm boy, Overlook. Remember I had to talk you into getting a valet? Your shoes never were blacked properly. And that butler of yours, and the chef—you never liked them, man."

He laughed again, remembering some episode; and he recounted it, and then another and another.

And Overlook, who had learned to think of himself as a thoroughly sophisticated man, began to see otherwise; he began to see a man miserable and alone, caught in a swirling current, fighting against it, hungering always for half-forgotten things.

"Like a creature caught in an eddy, trying to get back into the main current of the stream," he thought, and ceased to hear what Cash was saying at all. "Trying to get into the current and go on," he amended. "Instead of standing

still. Instead of spinning in a circle, to go ahead, keep going on."

And he had a momentary glimpse of the future as a challenge, heard the word "Forward!" like a battle cry.

When Cash presently paused, lighting another cigarette, Overlook said thoughtfully, "I see. Of course it's different with you and Mrs. Cash. You're born to it; that's where you belong."

Cash hesitated; and then in a still way he laughed, and Overlook was sorry for him. For—"I was born in Iowa," said Cash. "And so was she."

When in the morning he took himself away, Overlook watched his car trundle out of sight toward the bridge; and then he turned back to June, waiting in the kitchen door; and he came toward her slowly, savoring his delight.

"Was I all right?" she asked appealingly when she was in his arms. "Did you want me different?" And found her comfort in the word he said.

Spring came eagerly, like the victor in a battle, jubilating after many harsh repulses; and

the snow blanket thinned and wore threadbare, and the drifts drained away, and the Sheepscot roared through the short nights when the airs were all so still and warm. There was throughout the valley the song of new life, springing in the sun.

Overlook's days were full; they hurried past him, tumbling one upon the other's heels; and he made what haste he could to fill each with as much of life as the span of it would hold. He was gripped by a furious and bounding energy, his thoughts as much engaged as were his hands. Yet had his hours for meditation too.

He had no sense of finality in this thing which he had done; had never the feeling that anything was finished or complete. Saw, too clearly, otherwise. Before he married June he saw the enterprise as irrevocable, like a curtain drawn across his world; it seemed to him to put a period to the past, to put an end to all his strivings. It wore in his eyes the aspect of a vast negation. But already he perceived his own lack of understanding; began to look forward, into the far ways, as June's habit always was. Discovered

that marriage is not an end but a beginning; not an achievement but an undertaking; not a conclusion but a challenge fine. He had had and would still have hours of black doubt and all discouragement and despair; yet he had learned already that with wisdom these hours might be endured and all passed by. And he began to see in their due proportion the obstacles that may cause one who walks blindly to stumble, but can never halt a strong and vigorous stride.

There were so many things to do; such a flood tide of life to be maintained at full flow, and in all its richness passed along.

It happened that one evening, while June was in the kitchen at her business there, he opened the old Bible and wandered in it, to and fro. And while he read, casually, he remembered that evening when he discovered this Book where his father had put it last away; and he remembered how he read the scroll of old names, and the ever-recurring name which he now bore.

And remembered how he had written, with a sense of dramatic finality, that he was the last of his line.

He sat a moment, smiling, as he thought of this; and he looked toward the kitchen and toward June. Then the man reached for his pocketknife and tested its smaller blade. It was keen and clean, ready for such an enterprise as scratching out and forever obliterating an injudiciously written word. And he turned the pages till he came to that one which he sought.

Then smiled again at what he saw—for June had been before him there.

THE END



